

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE GRACIOUS, THE MERCIFUL

By the Dawn's Early Light:

Short Stories by American Converts to Islam

By the Dawn's Early Light:
Short Stories by American Converts to Islam

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A Publication of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya USA

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Publisher's Note

To enhance readability, we have translated and simplified use of Islamic and Arabic terminology wherever possible. Islamic tradition narrates that after the name Muhammad, or his titles such as the Holy Prophet or the Founder of Islam, one should say “peace and blessings be upon him.” After the names of other Prophets and Messengers of God, one should give respect by offering “on whom be peace” after their respective names. The actual salutations have not been set out in full for the sake of brevity; however the reader should treat the full salutation as implicit upon seeing the names of these noble personalities. While the Arabic term *Khalifa* may refer to a “successor” of any prophet, in the present work it generally refers to the successors of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The reader may refer to the Glossary for more details.

In referencing the Holy Qur'an, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community counts “In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful” as the first verse of the chapter in which it appears. However, some publishers of the Holy Qur'an begin counting after the above-mentioned verse. Should the reader not find the relevant verse under the number we have given, it would be found in the adjacent lower number.

Translation of the Arabic verses of the Holy Qur'an mentioned in this book have been taken from Maulawi Sher Ali's translation found in “*The Holy Qur'an - Arabic Text and English Translation*” published in 2004 by Islam International Publications Ltd. Many translators add explanatory words in their translation, which is not found in the Qur'anic text; but they see to it that the reader is not misled to consider them as the words of the Qur'an. We have italicized such words when reproducing the translation within this book as well.

Rather than include footnotes, we have preferred to provide a Glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms. These can be found starting on page 210.

Foreword

"Our Lord, we have heard a Crier calling us unto faith, 'Believe ye in your Lord,' and we have believed."

Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya USA presents 40 stories, 40 lives, of young men born into diverse faiths and belonging to different racial and cultural backgrounds – all sharing one common trait: they were blessed with the courage to follow their inner voice. These brothers challenged the status quo and did not allow dogma to cloud their vision. They prove to us that human beings can change. During that process, some lost their families while others lost much more. But they heard the crier, believed, and in the end, found God Almighty!

I have the distinct honor of personally knowing many of these brothers. Whenever I meet one of them, I am awestruck by how the 'Crier' is still calling people unto faith. Whether you were born into the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, joined it in your lifetime, or are still seeking, at some point must not each 'hear the Crier' and proclaim with your actions that you believe? Making that decision is a heavy burden, one which requires the painful process of self-analysis, personal change and sacrifice. Please join me in praying: "Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our errors and remove from us our evils, and in death number us with the righteous" (Qur'an 3:194) and let this process begin.

*Faheem Younus Qureshi
Sadr, Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya USA*

Acknowledgments

His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the Fifth Khalifa of the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, blessed this initiative with much needed prayers and guidance. May Allah strengthen his hands.

Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya (MKA) USA conceived, staffed, and funded the publication of this book. A terrific team of editors worked diligently with our writers to ensure high quality stories: Managing Editor Sardar Anees Ahmad, Salaam Bhatti, Qasim Rashid, Imran Tahir, and Harris Zafar.

As the Production Editor, Naem R. Mohamed took 40 separate stories and sifted through hundreds of photos to design and produce this book. Our Cover Artist, Muksit Jamil, created a simple and thought-provoking piece, which represents precisely the message we wish to convey to our readers: Islam is just as much for Americans as it is for those in the East. Salman Sajid helped to bring the cover from concept to final form.

National *Amila* (Board) members guided the project from its nascent stages on through copyediting. In particular, we owe a debt of gratitude to its *Sadr* (President), Faheem Younus Qureshi, for his gracious and selfless support. Rizwan Alladin, Bilal Rana, Atif Mian, Muhammad Ahmad Chaudhry, Abdul Hadi Ahmed, Nasir Ahmad, and all *Qaideen* (Leaders) of MKA shared advice and reached out to converts in their locales to make the book come to fruition. Amjad Mahmood Khan served as Copy Editor for the compiled manuscript.

Finally, we thank our writers for their inspiring stories. The Holy Prophet Muhammad said, “When a person dies, his actions come to an end except in respect of three matters that he leaves behind: a continuing charity, knowledge from which benefit could be derived and righteous progeny who pray for him.” (*Sahih Muslim*)

We pray that these stories continue to benefit and guide readers for generations to come.

*Naveed A. Malik
Editor-in-Chief
Chicago, Illinois
May 27, 2009*

Introduction

Who speaks for Islam?

The short answer is everyone. Politicians, pundits and priests – everyone has an opinion. Lost in the discussion, however, are the voices of American converts to Islam. Converts offer a unique and insightful perspective on Islam; neither did they inherit their Islamic beliefs, nor did they engage in agenda-driven research.

By the Dawn's Early Light represents the voice of a new generation of American Muslims. Despite the fact that fanatical clerics misrepresent Islam, Americans continue to be drawn to Islam's true teachings; indeed they are converting at an increasing pace, especially since the tragic events of September 11, 2001. This book captures the stories of 40 young men from diverse religious, ethnic, racial and geographical backgrounds. They share their personal relationships with the Muslim world's only Khalifa. Raised as Christians, Jews, or Orthodox Muslims – all who are now Ahmadi Muslims – they come to you from all across America – Hawaii to Massachusetts – and indeed from around the world. They are Black, White, and Latino. They are security guards, professors, truck drivers, actors and engineers. They are all hard-working Americans who give back to their local communities in many ways. American Ahmadi Muslims are loyal and loving citizens of this great Nation, following Prophet Muhammad's directive, "love for one's country is part of the faith." (*Sakhavi*)

Who are Ahmadi Muslims?

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (AMC) is a dynamic, fast growing international revival movement within Islam. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), the Promised Messiah, founded the Community in 1889. Today AMC spans over 190 countries with membership exceeding tens of millions. AMC USA, established in 1921, is the first American Muslim organization. Its journal, *The Muslim Sunrise*, is the first and longest running American Muslim periodical.

Ahmad's advent has brought about an unprecedented era of Islamic revival and moderation. He divested Islam of fanatical beliefs and practices by vigorously championing Islam's true and essential teachings. He also recognized the noble teachings of the great religious founders and saints,

including Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, Confucius, La Tzu, and Guru Nanak, and explained how such teachings converged into the one true Islam. AMC is the leading Islamic organization to categorically reject terrorism in any form.

AMC is now headed by Ahmad's Fifth Khalifa, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, who resides in the United Kingdom. Under the leadership of its spiritual successors, AMC has now built over 10,000 mosques, over 500 schools, and over 30 hospitals. It has translated the Holy Qur'an into over 60 languages. It propagates the true teachings of Islam and the message of peace and tolerance through a twenty-four hour satellite television channel (MTA), the internet (alislam.org) and print (Islam International Publications). It has been at the forefront of worldwide disaster relief, including Hurricane Katrina, the Asian tsunami and the South Asian earthquake, through an independent charitable organization, Humanity First (humanityfirst.org).

AMC's auxiliary organization, Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya (MKA), also known as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association, is comprised of Ahmadi Muslim men from their teens up to 40 years of age. Considered the backbone of AMC, its members are called *Khuddam*, meaning 'servants' in Arabic. In 2008 alone, MKA adopted more than 50 highways across America, donated more than 700 units of blood – which will save more than 2,100 American lives – distributed food to 13,000 needy individuals and donated more than 12,000 items of clothing. It is worth noting that 2009 marks the 40th anniversary of MKA USA. Fittingly, we present here 40 stories for 40 years.

What do American Muslim converts have to say?

While each convert's journey is unique, a number of themes recur in their stories, which merit discussion. In Islam converts found a simple, logical, moral code by which to live their lives – a religion which never asked Christians to give up Jesus, but allowed them to embrace an even broader religious tradition, encompassing the entire world. For example, Rasheed Reno, of Portland, Oregon, writes: "I was impressed how Islam accepted people of all different races and cultures. Equally impressive was its acceptance of other religions and considering them to be part of itself."

Christians, Jews and Muslims alike found the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam to be most logical explanation of Islamic beliefs – in agreement with scientific thought, and not against it. Our brothers praised the unity of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community under the leadership of the Khalifa.

They repeatedly mentioned the Fourth Khalifa's question and answer sessions as enlightening and inspiring. They found the brotherhood of MKA unparalleled in any other American or religious institution.

Ahmadi Muslims come from all walks of life but one thing converts have in common is their high level of knowledge. While spirituality and brotherhood are important themes, writers consistently mention reading the Qur'an and the writings of the Promised Messiah and his successors: namely, *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat* and *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. The latter not only explains Islamic beliefs, it makes you want to change your life.

It is remarkable indeed to observe the transformations these young men underwent upon accepting Islam and joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Sakeena Amatul Haqq writes about her husband, Bashir Abdul Haqq, from the Bronx, New York: "Theodore [his given name] was ignorant, arrogant, violent, abusive, deceitful and just the usual thug. He was a hustler. The difference now is night and day. He is the reason I [also] accepted Islam." Michael Morris of Roxbury, Massachusetts grew up riddled with personal, professional and legal trouble, and found only Islam was able to get through to him: "What comes from heart goes into the heart," reflects Michael, now a happily married, gainfully employed volunteer in his local community. While religious doctrine is indeed important, more than one Christian convert mentioned Jesus' teaching, to judge a tree by its fruit. Joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, as these stories will show, leads converts to become righteous, God-fearing people who serve God and His creation.

Almost every Christian convert also observed that the questions they asked to their parents and pastors, about Christian doctrine, were brushed off. They were told to "have faith." Mahershala Hashbazz Ali, whose mother, aunt and grandmother were all Christian ministers, writes: "It was hard to admit, but when I questioned *why* I believed what I believed...I could only respond with, 'That's what I was told.' And for many of the fundamental questions that I had, where there were gaps in my understanding, I was often told, 'That's where you have to have faith.'" But these brothers refused to live with logical inconsistencies and dug deeper.

These individuals had the spiritual vision to look beyond their inherited beliefs to seek out other paths, and found Islam. They pushed past anti-Islamic (or anti-Ahmadiyya) propaganda and conducted their own thorough investigation, reading book after book. At times their initial study of Islam was in an attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity, like Alex Ali Navarro, from Glen Ellyn, Illinois, only to find they had stumbled onto the truth. Alex writes,

"[My friend Qasim] would ask me questions about Christianity, and every Sunday I would ask the ones I couldn't answer to my Pastor. At that point my Pastor realized that I wasn't asking the questions for [Qasim] anymore. Instead, I was asking them for myself. The moment my pastor told me to stop talking to Qasim, I realized I was no longer a Christian." Our brothers had the insight not just to recognize the truth, but the moral courage to accept it. They did so, oftentimes, at great personal sacrifice.

What does it mean to take the pledge or to be initiated into the Community?

The Arabic term *bai'at* has been translated here as "pledge" or "initiation," but its true meaning is far more profound than a simple pledge. Accordingly, the Promised Messiah said: "Bai'at truly means to sell oneself; its blessings and impact are based on that condition. Just as a seed is sown into the ground, its original condition is that the hand of the farmer has sown it, but it is not known what will happen to it. If the seed is of a good quality and possesses the capacity to grow, then with the grace of Allah the Almighty, and as a consequence of the work done by the farmer, it grows until one grain turns into a thousand grains. Similarly, the person taking bai'at has to first adopt lowliness and humility and has to distance himself from his ego and selfishness. Then that person becomes fit for growth. But he who continues to hold on to his ego, along with taking bai'at, will never receive any grace." (*Malfoozat*, vol. 6, p. 173)

The Promised Messiah further said, "To take bai'at means handing over your life to Almighty Allah. It means, 'Today we have sold our life to Almighty Allah.' It is wrong to say that by treading in the path of Allah anybody would ultimately suffer a loss. The truthful can never be in a state of loss. Only he who is false - i.e. who, for worldly gain, breaks the pledge that he has made with Almighty Allah - suffers loss. One who commits such an action because of the fear of the world should remember that at the time of his death no ruler or king of this world would come to procure his release. He has to present himself to the Judge of all the judges, Who will inquire of him, 'Why did you not honor Me?' Therefore, it is essential for all the believers to believe in Allah, Who is the King of the heavens and earth and to make a true repentance."

(*Malfoozat*, vol. 7, pp. 29–30)

Initiation is predicated upon the acceptance of ten conditions laid down by the Promised Messiah himself. Every convert from his lifetime on through the present - including our writers, who are 40 in number - accepted these

conditions prior to joining the Community. It is interesting to note that on the very first day that the Promised Messiah accepted converts, March 23, 1889, exactly 40 people joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

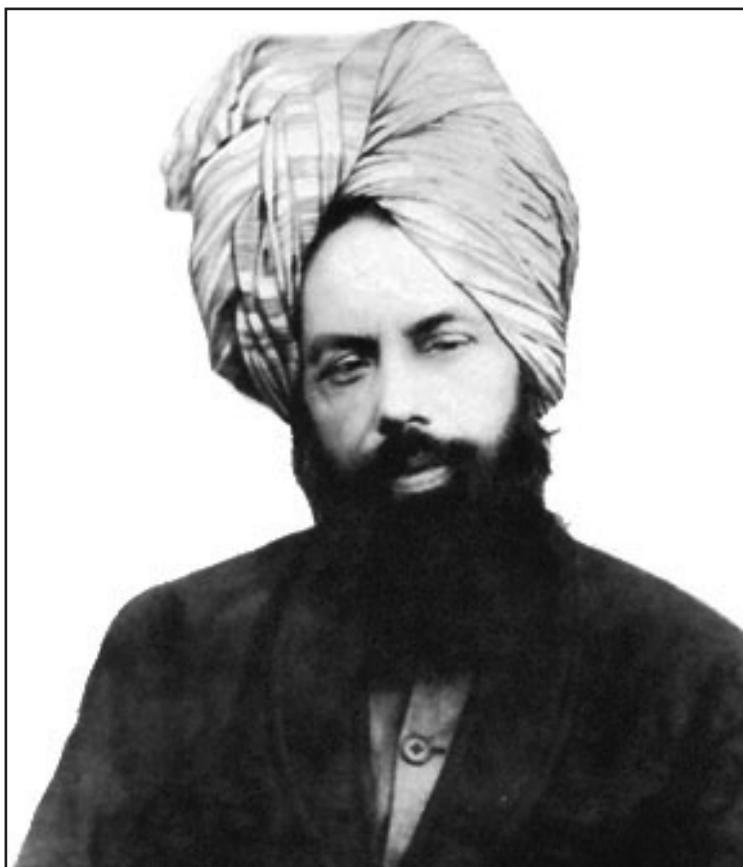
How is America significant to Islam?

The title of this book, *By the Dawn's Early Light*, speaks to Islam in America. Our readers will recognize the title from the American national anthem's poetic verses: "...by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed, at the twilight's last gleaming..." However, most are probably not familiar with the prophecy made by Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah: "In the Latter Days, the sun shall rise from the west." (*Sahih Bukhari*) The principle meaning of this prophecy is that the "sun of Islam" would reach the Western world in the Latter Days.

Indeed the 20th century, a time of great progress in the world, also heralded the spread of Islam to the West. In 1920, Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq became the first Muslim missionary to arrive in America. He spent two brief years in America but drew more than 700 converts to Islam prior to departing home. Our writers, and all Ahmadi Muslim converts in America, are a legacy of Dr. Sadiq's pioneering work in the 1920s. Accordingly, Bilal Rana presents a brief portrait of Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq in the present work.

Today's converts to Islam serve as that "early light," foreshadowing a day when Americans and those in the West will accept Islam in large numbers, in accordance with this prophecy. Our writers dispel the unfair notion that Muslims cannot be loyal Americans. Indeed most of our writers were first and foremost Americans, who accepted Islam, and continue to love and serve their country. American Muslims are presently found in the U.S. Congress, as American ambassadors, mayors, doctors, lawyers, and from every walk of life, in growing numbers. Yet in the 19th century, back at a time when scarcely a single "Mohammeden" could be found in all of America, the Promised Messiah wrote: "What has been shown to me in a vision is that the rising of the sun from the west means that the Western countries which have been involved in the darkness of unbelief and misguidance from ancient times will be illuminated by the sun of guidance and will receive a share of Islam." (*Izala Auham*)

Thus, we present the lives of 40 souls basking in the early light of that long prophesied "sun of guidance."



Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian
The Promised Messiah & Mahdi

By the Dawn's Early Light:
Short Stories by American Converts to Islam



Ahmad Nuruddin
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

“Before I had finished half the Qur'an, I knew it was a living book from God.”

I was born Noel Durham in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1972. Along with two brothers, Joseph and Nathaniel, and sister, Marie, I was raised in a pseudo-Christian household. We were raised to believe in God and know right from wrong, but I cannot say we were involved with religion more than that. Our grandparents were practicing Baptists and when my siblings and I visited them we would attend church regularly. My mother was a housewife, tending to her children's upbringing primarily, while my stepfather worked for a pipe supply company.

I went to public school and I still remember my mother stressing the importance of education throughout my childhood. As a family we did not have many means – luxuries were sacrificed in order for all of us to excel in education. It is a tribute to my mother that all of us did, despite the inner-city environment, obtain good grades and stay out of trouble.

I was also a good athlete, playing basketball and football when I was younger. In high school, I replaced basketball with wrestling but still kept playing football. I played both offensive and defensive tackle for the football team and became the captain during my senior year at Abraham Lincoln High School. I also wrestled as a heavyweight, which is the 225 pound-plus weight class. Our team won the citywide championship every year from my sophomore year onwards, and my personal record was 30-3.

During my junior year of high school, my elder brother Joseph came home from college during a holiday and said he is a Muslim and does not eat pork. At the time, it was a 'thing' in Philadelphia, kind of fashionable you can say, to

give up pork to try to purify oneself. This was my first real contact with Islam. While my family members were not antagonistic, they were a bit curious as to why this sudden change had come about in Joseph. I also had a cousin, Rashid, who was the same age as me and identified with the teachings of the Nation of Islam.

One time, Rashid gave me a Muslim head cap as a gift and I wore it the entire day because I liked the look. Surprisingly enough, throughout the entire day people would pass when I was walking on the street and say, "Assalaamu 'alaykum." This may not be a big deal to some folks, but those who are familiar the hustle-bustle lifestyle of any major American city know people just don't stop to say hello. When I found out that these people were wishing peace upon me simply because they assumed I was a Muslim, a small attraction began to develop for Islam.

After graduating from high school I enrolled at Indiana University (IU) in Pennsylvania, the same college my brother Joseph had attended. I continued to pray to God in times of trial or joy. This belief in God is due in part to the training my grandparents instilled in me. I would visit the church near campus sometimes and experienced more of what I had seen while at home – singing and dancing, but no real guidance on personal development and refinement. By the Grace of God, despite some hard times, I earned my Bachelor's in Marketing in 1990.

When I returned home to start work, I found Islam was even more popular in Philadelphia. Muslim men, however, had become known for committing crimes and being abusive towards women. I remembered that when I was a child I had dream in which I had been in a car accident; it seemed as though I was hovering above the scene, and after the accident, I sat down in the median. The dream was strange as I had never been in an accident. I don't know why I recalled that dream following college. Anyways, one night my brother Joseph and I decided to visit our alma mater and on the way back, the car went out of control and violently flipped off the highway. Alhamdolillah, Joseph and I survived with only a few minor bumps and bruises.

A few months later I spotted an exact replica of the car that we were in during the accident. The car had a personalized license plate that said "B Ready." I found this very peculiar and feverishly prayed for God to show me the truth. I began studying Islam and the Holy Qur'an. I noticed that if I had problem, I would open the Qur'an and eventually arrive on something that addressed the problem. Before I had finished half the Qur'an, I knew it was a living book from God. Eventually, I completed the entire English translation. I prayed, "If

this is the truth, God, please guide me and allow me to fully understand and implement its teachings."

Thereafter I started to discuss my impressions of the Qur'an with friends. I also visited a few mosques but was disappointed at the lack of love and brotherhood the Muslims showed me simply because I was not a Muslim, at the time. One day, after a game of basketball with my cousin Rashid and some of his friends, three of the brothers asked if we would like to visit the mosque to offer prayers and eat. I did not know that these three brothers, Idrees Mahmood, Daud Mahmood, and Usman Abdul Karim, were Ahmadi Muslims at the time.

After we had offered prayers and eaten, we began a discussion on Islam and I was very impressed that they took an interest in my education of Islam. The first question they asked was whether I knew how to perform prayers in Arabic. As I did not, they began teaching me the entire prayer. I actually learned Surah Al-Fatihah that very day. Over a three-month span, I learned the fundamentals of Islam, the true story of Jesus Christ, and who the Promised Messiah and his successors were. I also became firmly grounded in the life of Prophet Muhammad. In fact, the first book I finished was *Life of Muhammad* by Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad, the Second Khalifa.

The pictures of the Promised Messiah and his successors had a profound impact on me. I was amazed that I was given that chance to actually see the face of a prophet of God as well as that of his noble successors. I knew this place, the Nasir Mosque, was the place to learn about Islam.

About a month after my first visit, in 1997, I joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, under the watchful and loving eye of Imam Mubasher Ahmad. At that time, many brothers helped me pick out a new name. I wanted some connection to the Promised Messiah, so I chose "Ahmad," the "one who praises," as my first name. Learning that the Promised Messiah wished all of his followers to be like his First Khalifa, Hakim Nuruddin, I chose "Nuruddin," "light of the faith," as my last name.

I was very impressed with the fact that these brothers, despite being American, could recite the Qur'an in fluid and beautiful Arabic, and it made me want to be at par with them. At that time, an elder brother, Rashid, came to the mosque weekly to hold an Arabic class. Within three months time, Alhamdolillah, I became fluent in the recitation of the Qur'an in Arabic. The first chapter I then memorized was Surah al-Ikhlas.

While the demographic of Nasir Mosque was seventy percent Pakistani and thirty percent African-American, 100% of the brothers were honorable and

honest people. I was enamored with the atmosphere as there was no backbiting or foul language, and all the brothers were highly educated and sincere. In particular, there was a brother named Munir Hamid, who I still recall was a striking figure because of his character and mannerisms.

Initiation into the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has made me a much more refined and spiritually awakened human being. In both my walk and talk, those around me, especially my family, have seen a marked difference. I feel as though entering into this Community is akin to finding a fountain after wandering through a desert for one's entire life. There is no way I can leave this fountain now. I am 100% confident that I am following the correct teachings of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad.

Our youth group, Khuddamul Ahmadiyya, is a beautiful organization that allows the youth to quickly mature into men – becoming educated in both religious and secular studies. Many of our Khuddam are honorable young men who take education seriously and I feel it is very rare to be amongst such young people who are not engaged in the nonsense so many others most unfortunately fall victim to.

By the grace of Allah, in 2002, I married a woman who had converted to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community one year prior. Allah has blessed us with three beautiful daughters.

“Initiation into the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has made me a much more refined and spiritually awakened human being.”

Now, let me tell you about Khilafat. Khilafat, to me, is the physical manifestation of a spiritual connection with God and His creation. It is the Khalifa who is the most qualified to cure all the ills the world is facing at this moment.

I entered the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community during the time of the Fourth Khalifa. I can still recall listening to his Friday sermons and question and answer sessions and being deeply convinced that this man was a very spiritual and knowledgeable man. His Friday sermons had a profound impact on me as they reflected what I had read in the Qur'an and made the teachings so easily applicable to my daily life. I never had a teacher like this! Through him, I felt connected to the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

I met the Fourth Khalifa at the 1998 Annual Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention, along with two other brothers. The first thing he asked was which one of us was married (only one of us was at the time). He then lovingly reached into his drawer and handed me and the other bachelor a Hershey's chocolate bar. I feel this was His Holiness' loving, yet subtle way of saying we should mature quickly and become fit for marriage.

On June 18th, 2008 I was blessed to have a meeting with the present Khalifa, Mirza Masroor Ahmad. I felt as though I had come full circle from my last meeting with the Fourth Khalifa. It was he who had suggested I get married. When I went in to meet the Fifth Khalifa, I had a wife and three daughters with me! His Holiness asked, "What do you do?", so I replied I was a middle school guidance counselor. This was the first time any of my family had met the Fifth Khalifa. He gave my eldest daughter a pen. My two younger daughters, despite being so shy around people that they do not even let some family members come near them, easily allowed His Holiness to embrace them. Such is the charisma of the Khalifa.

I now serve as the Vice President of the Philadelphia chapter. It is due to the training of the late Munir Hamid that I was able to uphold this responsibility. I ask my brothers to remember him in their select prayers, as well as my family. I pray that every reader finds my story of benefit and blessings.



Ahmad Nuruddin as he awaits his turn to address the audience of the 2007 Annual Convention of the USA Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

“And when My servants ask thee about Me, say: ‘I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he prays to Me. So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way.”

- Holy Qur'an, 2:187



Ronald Abdur Rahim Hubbs, Jr.
Chino, California

“When I woke up that morning, I knew without a shadow of a doubt that Islam was my path.”

I am originally from St. Louis, Missouri, and was born and raised in the Catholic Church. I belonged to the Church of the Transfiguration in North County St. Louis where I attended weekly religion classes, played little league baseball, and received Communion and Confirmation rites. Being from St. Louis, my other religion was sports. Throughout childhood, high school, and college I was very active in athletics – eventually the captain of my high school baseball, football and wrestling teams. Athletics always came easily to me and I even received scholarship offers from different colleges for baseball and football. I would eventually attend the University of Missouri at Columbia, where I somehow wound up playing rugby.

While at Mizzou, I studied Political Science and Sociology and began to enjoy reading and writing on new subjects. I was exposed to new ideas and perspectives that I now believe started to pave the way to my later acceptance of Islam. For one, I read the autobiography of Malcolm X and was very moved by Malcolm's own transformation. He gave strong arguments against some common Christian beliefs, and in many ways, laid bare the true reality of the history of the United States. By the end of his life, I was impressed to know that his Hajj to Mecca led him to see all races as equals, a radical departure from his earlier reactionary, racist sentiments.

Besides this book, I attended classes that gave me a much deeper perspective than I had gotten in high school coursework. I started to see that I really didn't know much about the true reality of history and, therefore, the present reality of the world. This led me to inquire about the many things I had

learned in the past. The more I began to study and ponder, the more I became disillusioned with politics and religion altogether. I became agnostic and even leaned towards atheism. Overly literalistic beliefs of the fanatical Christians on campus really turned me off. It wouldn't be until I was 25 years old and miserable in nearly every aspect of my life, that I would start to more deeply explore spirituality.

After college, I moved to Los Angeles for a change of scenery. I tinkered with different professions and wound up in marketing, hoping that lots of money would isolate me from all of the world's problems. After a few years, I already felt burned out. I felt completely unfulfilled, and lost. My life was a mess on several fronts – it was not turning out how I had pictured it at all. I was very disillusioned with the direction of my life, my country and even the world. I felt a deep feeling of dread – as if some type of great calamity was around the corner. This pulled me instinctively towards investigating spirituality and religion on my own. I began to read the Bible, pray, even ponder Eastern Philosophy – I was very open-minded to different religions. I wanted to find the Truth. I didn't care where it came from.

When I came upon Islam, it really caught me off guard. I had never considered it. It seemed so foreign and I knew nothing about it. I was surprised, however, to learn that Islam was very simple and comforting. The five pillars of faith and six articles of belief were refreshingly simple and easy to grasp. I was even already practicing most of them, as I was fasting and praying and knew that God was One. I stayed up all night in prayer begging God to help me make the right decision, until I actually fell asleep in prayer. When I woke that morning, December 13, 1998, I knew without a shadow of doubt that Islam was my path.

From that point on, my evolution within Islam has been continuous. I knew right away that there were many viewpoints and sects within Islam, so I used the same formula that had gotten me that far: I humbly and sincerely begged God for help and guidance, and then I continued to search. Alhamdulillah, I soon found myself having lunch everyday with Imam Mukhtar Cheema and reading the books of the Promised Messiah. Equally soon I realized that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was no ordinary man. No one could write in this way and speak such gems and foretell such prophecies and make such claims, unless they were who they said they were. I thought to myself, "How could Allah let someone so boldly lie and mislead, yet have such success and make so much sense?" When I prayed on it and reviewed the facts, it was really a no-brainer. As the Qur'an and Bible instruct, I judged the tree by the fruits that it produced. I took my pledge in 1999.

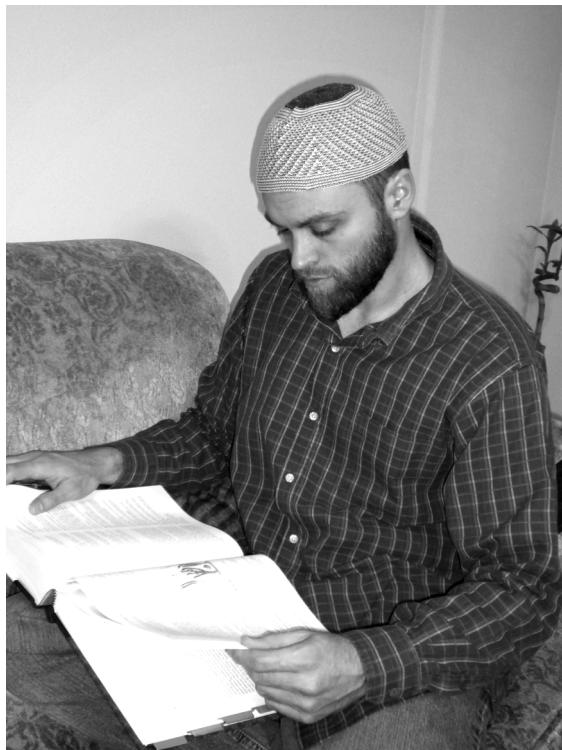
My mother and I already didn't have the best relationship, and my conversion made it infinitely worse. But through the teachings of Islam, I trained myself to be respectful and patient – no matter what. So after years of not speaking and hard feelings from my mother, I am delighted to say that my mother and I now have a good relationship and talk frequently. While she still does not agree with my choice of religion, she admits that she sees the positive effect that Islam has had on my life.

I was Muslim just under two years when I married my wife, who is from Rabwah, Pakistan. I have to admit that it was somewhat strange having an arranged marriage – especially since my family was not involved and my wife's family is all in Pakistan. Our marriage was quite simple and it was a bit bumpy in the beginning, but I am pleased to say that we are now both very happy and have been married for more than eight years. I often joke that my old way of doing things got me into mess after mess in relationships, but through Islam and an arranged marriage, things have only gotten better and better with time. Islam, with all its parameters and roles concerning marriage, provides a "success manual" for this all-important institution. With so many opinions and so-called "experts" on the subject yet such a miserable state of affairs, I find great comfort in Islam's teaching and guidance on marriage.

"Equally soon I realized that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was no ordinary man."

After accepting Islam Ahmadiyya, I began to pray to Allah to inform me what I should do with my life. Within a short time, I found myself becoming more and more interested in holistic health. By following Islamic dietary guidelines and using natural medicine, my health problems drastically improved. As time went on, I instinctively knew that this was the path that Allah had written for me. I studied several different schools of thought and attended workshops and classes all around the country until coming to the conclusion that Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture were the best foundation for me pursue in the holistic health field.

Philosophically and technically, I found it in many ways to be in harmony with Qur'anic principles and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Considering the pandemic and multiplying health problems in our country and world, I pray that I will be of service to humanity in this pursuit. I always heard that one should find what they love to do and then get paid to do it. Alhamdulillah, Allah has gifted me with just this scenario.



Ronald Abdur Rahim Hubbs, Jr. as he studies traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture.

I am struck with awe and gratitude for the many miracles in my life – instances in which I've found myself in the right place at the right time and been blessed to know it and take action. Whether it's reading a fulfilled prophecy from the hadith or Qur'an or just seeing the ongoing progress of the Community, it is an amazing feeling to know that I am part of the spiritual family of the Messiah. I pray that Allah awaken more people to this Blessed Cause.

Islam has given me a much-needed code and discipline to live by, without being overly rigid and stifling. This balance, I think, engenders ongoing personal growth and success. I have also found the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community a necessary component in fulfilling my Islam. Without this Community, there is no guidance and no organizational structure to accomplish all that Islam should be accomplishing today.

In this regard, I am very proud to be a Khadim. I have been part of many teams and organizations in my life, but none as extraordinary as Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya (MKA) – the group of 15-40 year-olds who serve as the backbone of the Community. MKA makes it easy for any young Muslim man to plug into an established network of dedicated service for Islam and the world. This is really important in an age where there is so much corruption, confusion and misdirection in Islamic organizations around the world.

I am currently involved in MKA's national and regional groups that spread the message of Islam. In the past, I have also served as a leader for my local MKA chapter. I have always enjoyed working alongside the amazing talent we have in our Community and have learned a lot about sacrifice and humility from many of our khuddam leaders – their examples often make me feel insecure about my own commitment level, and, thus, push me on to do more.

One of the purely fun things I enjoy about being a khadim is the brotherhood and camaraderie. We usually play football Saturday mornings (I never thought a bunch of Pakistanis could be so good at an American sport!). MKA has helped me make many friends across the country, and even the world. It gives the feeling that Muslim brothers should have for one another – truly caring for each other and wanting the best for each other. Long live MKA!

Besides my involvement in MKA, I am most grateful for the institution of Khilafat. I must admit that at first I did not fully appreciate its importance. In the beginning, I had brought a cynical attitude with me into Islam and didn't fully realize what a blessing it was. With time, study and witnessing many stellar examples of dedication to the institution, it dawned on me that Khilafat was the very next best thing to having a prophet to follow.

In fact, I realized that the Khalifa was the torchbearer of the Prophet Muhammad and the Promised Messiah. I asked myself, "How would I act if in the presence of Prophet Muhammad or his Messiah?" My answer was that I would do anything I could to serve in any way I was asked. I knew that I must have the same attitude towards the Khalifa that Allah had blessed us with. History shows that people have lost Allah's guidance and favor because they did not fully appreciate the institution of Khilafat. I have now personally met two Khulafa and have been transformed by both of their influences.

I pray that Allah allows me to continue serving His cause and increase my ability to do so. Ameen.

"The method of establishing a perfect spiritual relationship with God that the Holy Qur'an teaches us is Islam, meaning devoting one's whole life to the cause of God and being occupied with supplications which we have been taught in Surah Al-Fatiha."

***- Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
The Promised Messiah***



Bashir Abdul Haqq
Bronx, New York

“I knew in my heart that I wanted to change the condition of my people and myself. This is where my journey began.”

It all started on August 31, 1979. That was the day Theodore Williams was born to the late Andrea Williams and Curtis Slaughter in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The next 22 years of my life would be good times, mostly filled with carelessness and regrettable behavior. I had tasted the full buffet of crime, drugs and being an agnostic (May Allah forgive me). I was raised by my mother Andrea Williams, and never knew my father. I heard he joined the military and was shipped to Germany when I was just an infant. Nevertheless my mother raised my sister, Chenelle, and me, first in Philadelphia, then in Dover, Delaware, and Virginia Beach, Virginia.

My great-grandfather, the late Willie James Williams Sr., was a preacher and he made the family go to church every Sunday. My mother did not really take to the church as some in my family had. When we moved away to Dover, and later to Virginia Beach, we never stepped foot inside a church again, unless there was a funeral to attend. My mother never really spoke of God much. Church just did not appeal to her for whatever reason.

As God was not the focus in our household, I did not think of God that often. And my life reflected this. As a child, I was known as a sweet and innocent little boy. My grandfather used to say I was so good that he thought maybe something bad would happen to me because bad things happened to good people. Unfortunately that innocent little boy became a miscreant, or simply put, a thug. At the tender age of nine, I was introduced to beer and marijuana from a loved one. I also learned how to lie in order to get the things

I wanted. Though I was doing forbidden things, there was always a sense of sadness within.

Being the new kid in the neighborhood, I was disliked and tested by most of the guys living around us. They disliked that I was from up north and made me fight them. I was bullied only because of where I was from. Over the years I became accustomed to fighting. I thank Allah that I never became a bully. I must add that I never liked to fight. It always made me feel very bad to hurt someone physically. My nature was that of a lost soul. I remember not liking the person I was becoming.

As time went on I became one of the most popular kids in my school. Everyone knew me and called me Theo – and my closest friends called me Teddy. I was able to make people do things because of my reputation. Most of the time I did not enjoy being the leader, but sometimes I did. I learned how to make money in the streets. I was 17 years old; I bought cars, clothes and the most expensive pair of Timberland boots that were out. I also went to the best restaurants. I remember my mother saying I had more cars by that age than she had owned in her entire lifetime. I owned seven cars before the age of 21. I had the city mentality in a southern town. I felt like I thought faster than the southern boys, and I did. I had the connections to become bigger in the street game, hustling. I was friends with some of the heavy hitters in the drug game. But something held me back from becoming the biggest street hustler in Virginia Beach.

Throughout my life something in my mind kept me thinking about life. I would constantly think, what is the purpose of life? I always loved to see the beauty of the early day and night sky. The stars glistening throughout the heavens made me feel good. I would often leave parties to walk around and staring at the heavens, thinking, can I be at peace like the Moon, whose face is shining upon the earth? Can I become at peace like the star which looks at the earth, winking her eyes? I always felt a sense of peace looking at the night sky. After hanging out all night I would watch the sunrise. Seeing the different colors emerge from the horizon made me feel at peace as well. I was never the type of person that would cry but on occasions when I was looking at either, I would shed tears.

When I was 14, I watched a movie called “Malcolm X.” Malcolm led a life similar to mine before he became a Muslim. I admired they way he turned his life around; how he did things to spread the message of God; how important it was to him to uplift his people; to educate them on who they really were, and how they needed to change their state of mind. I knew in my heart that

I wanted to change the condition of my people and myself. This is where my journey began.

Being African American, I understood the pain and suffering Malcolm X experienced, and I wanted to change, but change is hard. I went to one of the Nation of Islam's mosques, located in Norfolk. I listened in on one of their speeches. I did not see the spirit of Malcolm X at that mosque. My mother would be the one to take me to the mosque and she stayed and listened with me on that occasion. The minister spoke to my mother in a manner that I disliked so I did not return. I would read some of the books the Nation published, but I lost myself once again.

Four years later, when I was 18, I returned to Philadelphia and found another form of Islam. That form was Sunni Islam. My understanding increased as I learned the basic principles of Islam. But the brotherhood was poor. I went from mosque to mosque seeking knowledge, but everyone kept to themselves. It did not matter which mosque I went to, we were divided. I then went back to Virginia Beach, where I now told people I was Muslim, even though I did not truly understand the meaning of Islam. I just knew that Muhammad was a messenger of God and God's name was Allah and I knew that no man could be God. I stopped doing a lot of the forbidden things but some things did not stop.

When I was 20, I went back to Philadelphia once again and I returned to the quest of knowledge with my uncle, whose name was Theodore Williams as well (my mother named me after him). We traveled from mosque to mosque together for a while. I never found a mosque to call home. I just did not feel comfortable at the mosques I went to.

“Being African American, I understood the pain and suffering Malcom X experienced, and I wanted to change, but change is hard.”

One day, my uncle and I went to an Islamic store on 52nd Street, in search of a book that could teach us Arabic. A sister came out and asked if we needed some help. After showing us the book, the sister told us we could go to the mosque located on 5120 N. 10th Street in Philadelphia to learn Arabic. She said that a brother by the name of Rashid taught Arabic classes every Sunday.

So my uncle's whole family and I went to the class on the following Sunday. I remember feeling at home in this mosque. Several months later, we were

invited to a general meeting at that mosque. My family and I arrived at the mosque and saw the Fourth Khalifa on the television. When we asked who he was they said that he was the Khalifa. My uncle and I thought, "What?" The khulafa we knew were dead. The brothers then explained that the messiah had come, and that this was an Ahmadiyya mosque. My uncle and I thought, "It's time to go," because we were taught that no prophet could come after Muhammad.

As we were walking out, brothers said, "We ordered pizza and we would like you to join us." Since my cousins were hungry, and I must admit I was hungry as well, my uncle decided to stay. This is when we were taught about Ahmadiyya beliefs. I remember thinking, are not all Muslims the same, and the brothers made it clear that Ahmadiyya means the true Islam. I remember watching the Fourth Khalifa's question and answer session and I was so amazed. I never heard anyone answer questions in the manner His Holiness did. He was precise and his statements were clear and he answered every question without hesitation. I knew this was what I was looking for.

In essence, I was home. I was elated to sign the pledge in 2002. I still enjoy listening to his Q & A sessions at askislam.org. Allah makes Muslims, and I now realize that he led me home. I am also glad that he allowed me to go through my life experiences. This is how I was able to know the true Islam when I came upon it. There is no way I could ever become a member of a church, synagogue, or another sect in Islam. In the Ahmadiyya Community, I have found the truth of religion, truth of self and, most importantly, truth of God. Islam Ahmadiyya has helped me become a better person, and I thank Allah that he turned Theodore Williams into Bashir Abdul Haqq. I like to say that death was given to Theodore Williams so that Bashir Abdul Haqq could have life. I will let my wife testify to the changes she sees within my self. She has seen the best of both worlds.

Bashir's wife, Sakeena Amatul Haqq writes: "I have seen the change in him. Theodore was ignorant, arrogant, violent, abusive, deceitful and just the usual thug. He was a hustler. He was such a hustler that he would hustle friends and family. Me being a bookworm, I was attracted to the bad boy. He was the kind of guy that your mother warns you about. He was fun, exciting and yet still annoying. I fell fast and I fell hard. He was street smart and book smart. I guess that's why he was such a good conman.

The difference is night and day. He is the reason I accepted Islam. I watched this young fellow mature in to Bashir Abdul Haqq. He started teaching classes on Islam and the more he taught the more he changed. He would read and I

would see him put into practice the things we would discuss in class. When he read Qur'an he would apply it to life. He still does it. After the morning prayer, when he reads the Qur'an, all through the day he reiterates what was read.

Bashir lives Islam. In the beginning his Islam was more passive. Now it seems like everyday he comes up with a new idea for spreading the message. He gets so absorbed in Islam sometimes I have to remind him of his balance. As a couple we have issues, the difference is now once the Qur'an is applied, problem solved. Bashir is knowledgeable, faithful, protective, truthful, and a good father. He is the kind husband with whom it's hard to stay mad. I am grateful to Allah for the change in him. Alhamdulillah."

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of all the worlds. Oh Allah, grant us success in our affairs and let us speak with Your mouth and let us see with Your eyes and let us walk with Your feet. Oh Allah, make us Muslims in this life as well as in the next. Ameen.

***“A man who sincerely repents for his sins
is like the one who has never sinned.”***

***- Holy Prophet Muhammad
Ibn Majah***



Luqman Hecimovich
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“The logic was undeniable.”

Growing up, you could call me your typical American kid. I was born and raised in Marinette, Wisconsin. While we lived in a farmhouse, we were not farmers. As 7th Day Adventists, we went to church every Saturday – not Sunday. When I was eight years old, my parents got divorced. My sisters and I lived with our mother and visited our father every other weekend. Shortly after they got divorced we moved to another town, where we attended a Baptist church. I have to say, they were a little fanatical, always preaching about burning in hell for eternity, and so on. But even before going to that church, I felt out of place in Christianity. It was odd to me that the entire Old Testament emphasized the Oneness of God yet we now worshipped Jesus as God. I always wondered why we were not more like “Jews who believe in the Messiah.” I did not like attending church, but since my mom would force me to go, I went. One day I was old enough to say no, this is not for me, and stopped going.

Growing up I was a bit of a troublemaker, rebelling against authority, mostly in school. I was not your best student academically, but I was always interested in history and religion. I liked learning about different cultures and religions, and had always hoped to learn some languages in the future. I used to tell myself, “Some day, I will travel the world, experience different cultures, and learn languages.”

Before any of that could happen, I had to graduate from grammar school. Well my shady antics landed me in trouble and my school wanted to expel me. So I packed up and moved to Milwaukee to live with my dad and to finish eighth grade. I graduated and began high school in Milwaukee before moving back to northern Wisconsin, midway through my freshman year, in early 2002.

I was now in high school, still not very interested in classes, but still fascinated by history and religion. My teacher assigned me to do a report on any topic, so I chose Islam. This was just after 9/11 so I thought it would be interesting. I gave a very brief presentation on the religion of Islam: Allah, Muhammad, the five pillars, and so on. In my research, I said to myself, wow, this is really interesting. From that point on, I had developed an interest in Islam. The town I lived in was really homogeneous: all white, all Christian, no Muslims. I knew I needed more diversity so I moved back to Milwaukee to finish high school.

My brother Sean and I were looking to rent a place together. He ran into some of his old high school buddies who happened to be Ahmadi Muslims. It just so happened that they were in town from Oklahoma to put their house up for rent, at the exact time we were looking for a place. I feel that it was God's will that we should run in to them that day.

We moved into their place, which had three floors: the living quarters up top, an empty storefront at ground level, and a basement. When we were moving in, I walked down to the basement and found the owners had stored a bunch of books and magazines, mostly on Islam. I started reading and found it really interesting. Some books cited prophecies about the coming of the Holy Prophet Muhammad from the Bible, so I referenced those and found them to be very convincing. I was so interested that I kept studying Islam for about a year.

About a year later, in 2005, I called my landlord's youngest son, Hanan Shahid. I said, "I've been reading up on Islam and I agree with everything, Hanan. I think I'm a Muslim." I still remember the date: October 1, 2005. Through my research I had found out about Ramadhan, the month of fasting, and Hanan told me, Ramadhan started that very same day. I felt that was also a Divine sign.

Hanan picked me up and took me to the mosque in Milwaukee the following Friday. We would go every weekend. I had even begun fasting. During the week I would go to the Shahid family's home, wait for sunset and break our fast together. So I got to know him and his family very well.

Over Ramadhan I got to learn more about the Community. (At first I was just studying the basic beliefs of Islam, which Ahmadi Muslims share along with most everyone else.) I learned how Prophet Jesus did not die on the cross, and how the Bible shows this as well. I also realized how mainstream Muslims rejected Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, just like mainstream Jews rejected Jesus. In short, everything added up.

During that first full year that I had spent studying Islam on my own, I had created a picture in my mind of what Islam was supposed to be. And in terms of both belief and action, Islam Ahmadiyya was exactly that picture. After attending Ahmadiyya Muslim functions for a full year, I accepted Islam, just before Ramadhan in 2006.

At first, my dad was upset. He said, "Look around the world today, son. Look at what the Muslims are doing; you want to be associated with this?" I responded that Islam is about love and tolerance, not what you see on television. And the Ahmadi Muslims practice the pure and pristine Islam which was taught by the Holy Prophet Muhammad. He was not convinced.

When I first began studying Islam, I gave up eating pork right away. Avoiding swine was important in the 7th Day Adventist Church as well. I had also immediately started offering the five daily prayers. I went to alislam.org and downloaded a prayer guide, which I used to teach myself the prayers, in Arabic. I was still partying, but once I started going to the Ahmadiyya mosque, I stopped doing all that, and left the bad crowd. When I took the pledge in 2006, I completely left my old ways behind.

The Shahid family suggested the name 'Luqman' for me, and since it was so close to Lucas, it just stuck. I liked the name 'Muhammad' so much that I adopted that myself. I kept Hecimovich just to keep my father happy, but later learned that the Prophet Muhammad actually taught converts to preserve their father's name in order to respect their lineage. In this way I pleased both my spiritual and biological fathers.

Eventually, my dad saw the changes in me. Like I said, I used to be a troublemaker. I drank, partied, etc, but Islam totally changed my life. And he saw that. One day my father came up to me, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Lucas, I am proud that you are a Muslim, and as long as it makes you happy, I am happy." The rest of my family and friends never had a problem with it. I even see my brother accepting Islam one day, InshaAllah.

After graduating high school, I went to work at the Shahid family's gas station. As they had four sons, I hung out with them a lot. In fact, you could say that I became a member of their family. (I like to call them my "brown family.") Hanan's mother, Nasira Shahid, and father, Abdur Raheem Shahid, treat me like their own son. After Ramadhan, they had a chance to buy some stores in Illinois and invited me to come and live with them. So I moved to Illinois, where I worked until September 2008.

At that time, I enrolled at Jami'a in Canada, a college that awards a Doctorate in Islamic Studies after a seven-year academic program. It was an

easy decision. It was purely by God's Grace that I was guided directly to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. As God guided me to the truth, I felt it was my duty to dedicate my life to spread His message. Lucas, the expelled 8th grader, became Luqman, the PhD candidate.

Believe it or not, I always get a positive response when I tell folks I am a Muslim. Ever since I wrote that essay in high school, I was interested in and spoke about Islam. My friends always knew I was leaning in that direction. They were open-minded and never gave me a hard time.

“The Promised Messiah broke it down, step by step. In fact, his writings were the main reason I continued my study of Islam.”

And of course I got a lot of love from my Ahmadi brothers. The whole Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is basically like a huge family. The Community is exactly like that picture I had in my mind, in which there was strong brotherhood. A lot of people said my story was an inspiration to them. I figure if my example increases other people's faith, that is a good thing. That is also why I thought I should go to Jami'a, because I am a white American and I can relate better to the lives led by white Americans, by Christians. Not because they're racist or anything, but because we all have our own biases. If a foreign guy comes up to you and says, 'Hey, join my religion,' they put up a wall – not everyone, but in general. But Islam is not a foreign religion, nor is it only for foreigners. It is open to us all, and it has made me a better person, much happier and closer to God. In fact, as soon as I started praying to Allah, every single prayer I offered was answered.

I still remember the first book I ever read: *Jesus in India*. The Promised Messiah broke it down, step by step. In fact, his writings were the main reason I continued my study of Islam. He used the Bible to prove Jesus' survival and migration; showing how he came for the twelve tribes of the House of Israel and that there were only two tribes in Nazareth; that had he died, he would have failed in his mission. He explained that just as the Jews mistakenly thought Prophet Elijah had ascended to heaven physically, Christians and Muslims thought Jesus had done the same. But in the same way that Elijah returned in the person of John the Baptist, Jesus returned in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The logic was undeniable.

I was truly blessed to have found the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and I feel that I have the perfect opportunity to serve as a light for the United States. Through my example, I hope to guide others to Islam. That said, it is not easy being a Muslim. If you keep good people around you, then temptation stays in check. As soon as you get around the wrong crowd, the temptation returns, so I always try to keep myself around good people. Jami'a is also very hard; we study volumes of literature, memorize portions of the Qur'an; I am also learning Urdu, Arabic, and a little Spanish. I had always hoped to travel the world and learn languages as a kid.

God granted my wish, in a way that brought me closer to Him, and fulfilled another wish. The day my father told me he was proud of me, he also related a story to me. He told me that when I was just a boy, he took me to the church, and he dedicated my life to God. I think to myself, MashaAllah I have been guided to God, and indeed dedicated myself to Him. May Allah guide my father and all else to the truth.

“Islam proclaims complete equality among mankind, irrespective of differences of caste, creed and color. The only criterion of honor it accepts is that of righteousness, not of birth, riches, race or color. The Qur'an says: Verily the most honorable among you, in the sight of Allah, is he who is the most righteous among you.”

***- Mirza Tahir Ahmad
The Fourth Khalifa***



Alex Ali Navarro
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

“Suddenly it all clicked...I felt more connected to God than I ever had before.”

I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago in a strong Christian Latino family. We went to church every Sunday for both morning and evening services. Unlike most kids, Sunday was always my favorite day of the week. I loved going to church because all my good friends were there and I always felt a spiritual connection.

Yet I always questioned my religion during my Sunday school class. Not the usual questions like, why do bad things happen to good people, or, what does the Bible mean to say in this or that verse. Instead, I used to question Jesus himself. I used ask, “How can Jesus be both God and Man?” The response was always the same: “Well he’s 100% God and he’s 100% Man, since God is limitless.” I was only in fifth grade at the time but even I knew a man couldn’t be 200% of something. So I dug a little deeper and asked, “Well if Jesus is God then why do we call him the son of God and why did He need to send him down? Couldn’t He just forgive us on His own since He has no limits? The answer I always received was, “We may not understand it now but it’s a part of His greater plan.” I heard that a lot as a kid and it always made my fellow classmates and me laugh since it was evident to us the teacher was stumped.

As I got older, though, I started getting extremely annoyed with that response. I wanted an actual answer and knew there had to be one out there. I always believed that if God wanted people to follow or convert to Christianity, He would connect with both their spiritual and intellectual sides. I believed religion needed to make sense logically.

Around the time I was in high school I began to feel comfortable with my knowledge of Christianity. I know I didn't understand everything but I felt that as a believer it was my duty as a Christian to bring others into the "One True Religion." I began talking to a good Ahmadi friend of mine, Qasim Rashid. Qasim and I had actually met during elementary school. His younger brother Ahmad was in my class and I would always head to their house after school. At their house we would stop playing whenever it was time for prayer. They would show me the Qur'an and explain to me about their prophets. Religion was such a large part of their lives.

For me, it was easy to begin talking to them and possibly convert them to Christianity. During my senior year of high school my friends and I would hang out every weekend. We would do the same thing every night; go watch a movie, play some pool and go to a Denny's or Steak 'n Shake restaurant afterward to sit and talk. Late into the night, the conversation would eventually lead towards religion, which meant that the night was over for most of the group. Everyone slowly started leaving and eventually Qasim and I would be the only ones left talking for hours upon hours, on Christianity and Islam.

I was initially surprised about how much he knew about Christianity and was a little shocked when he began to talk about Jesus as an important religious figure in Islam. We talked about a wide variety of topics from why Muslims don't eat pork to the Christian belief of why Jesus, peace be on him, needed to die for all our sins and even evolution. Many times I found myself laughing at my own answers to Qasim. I had actually begun saying exactly what my Sunday school teachers said to me, "It's all a part of God's grand plan and we may not understand it now, but we have to believe in it." Although I had gotten to the part in my life where that was an acceptable answer to me, Qasim refused accept it. So I began talking to my pastor and asking him the questions that Qasim had for me.

During that year I learned more about Christianity than I had learned in the first seventeen years of my life. Every week was the exact same: I would hangout with Qasim on Friday and Saturday, he would ask me questions about Christianity and every Sunday I would ask the ones I couldn't answer to my Pastor. My Pastor would answer the question and I would relay that to Qasim. Every answer, however, would just lead Qasim to another question so I would have to go back to my Pastor every Sunday with a new list of questions. This continued for roughly eight months. At that point my Pastor realized that I wasn't asking the questions for Qasim anymore. Instead, I was asking them for myself.

I needed to receive not just an answer, but an answer I believed in. Otherwise, I would quickly respond with a follow-up question. The pastor knew it before I did, but I was quickly becoming a Muslim. All my beliefs were the same as theirs now.

The moment my pastor told me to stop talking to Qasim, I realized I was no longer a Christian. I was frightened at first. My entire family was Christian, as were the majority of my friends. Christianity was all I knew. It's what I grew up with. I never imagined myself converting to a different religion, ever. For two months I kept my distance from Qasim. If he called, I ignored him. If even our casual group conversations led to religion, I didn't join in anymore.

I wanted things to go back to the way they were before we began talking about religion, but they would not. It was never the same again. When I went to Church, I no longer felt a spiritual connection and as the pastor spoke, I found fault with everything he said. I knew I could not go on living like this, so I eventually put my own fears aside and finally answered Qasim's call. He began taking me to classes at the mosque where all the questions I had about Christianity were answered, from the Islamic perspective. In the months that followed I began to learn about Islam Ahmadiyya, the Five Pillars of Islam and the return of Jesus in the form of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. I desperately wanted to learn more, so I was got a hold of books like *Jesus in India* and *Ahmadiyyat the True Islam*.

Suddenly on the day of April 4th 2001, less than two months after my 18th birthday, it all clicked. I felt more spiritually connected to God, to Allah, then I ever had before. On that night, Qasim and I ended up at Denny's – talking about religion. He asked me what, if anything, was holding me back from converting, and I proclaimed, "Nothing." He informed me if I wanted to convert all I would have to do is profess Allah is the One True God and Muhammad is His messenger. I didn't sign the pledge until a year or two later, but on that day I was a Muslim.

Since then I have continued to grow spiritually. I have read more religious books and my thirst for knowledge continues. Looking back, it was hard to integrate at first because I only really knew Qasim. But as I began attending MKA retreats and going to the mosque, more people reached out to me, and that brotherhood was definitely a factor in helping me to stay with Islam. Otherwise, you get this feeling that you are all alone in this and wonder whether you have made the right decision. Thankfully, I now have a lot of Ahmadi Muslim friends and they help me in my faith.

Belonging to a Community with a spiritual leader like our Khalifa means a lot to me as well. In 2008 I traveled to London to attend Qasim's wedding function at Baitul Futuh Mosque. There was a group of us standing outside the Mosque, ready to receive His Holiness, who would be attending. When he got out of the car, there was a whole row of people standing along the sidewalk waiting to shake his hand. I was standing behind everyone so I would not be able to reach out to shake his hand. When His Holiness got to about where I was, he not only noticed me standing there, behind everyone, but he must have known I was too shy to move up front, so he stopped, moved the people in front of me aside, reached out and shook my hand. That is one of the greatest moments of my entire life.

Islam also taught me the importance of a good education, so after graduating from high school, I continue my education at Northern Illinois University, where I received my Bachelors of Science in Accountancy. I now work as a tax accountant and am also currently in the process of obtaining my CPA.

My goals for the future are to reach as many people who are willing to hear the teachings of Islam Ahmadiyya. In 2008 I began talks on producing a Spanish newsletter for American Latinos in the hopes of reaching out to more of them. I hope to begin publication in the near future, InshaAllah. I pray my spiritual growth will never end and to those that are reading this, my hope is that yours never ends either. Whatever your religion and to whichever God you pray, I urge you to put your fears aside and learn as much as you can to satisfy your spiritual needs.



Meeting in London with His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, are Qasim Rashid (left), Alex Ali Navarro (middle) and Kashif Qaderi (right).



Mirza Ghulam Rabbi
New York, New York

"Islam Ahmadiyya solved the puzzle of my life."

Life is full of surprises, but do we ask ourselves why these surprises are happening to us? Some surprises bring to us the glad tidings towards truth, and some bring to us trials to protect us from falsehood. There is a reason for everything. Have you wondered why you are reading this chapter about a stranger? How did you get a hold of this book?

My search for answers to similar questions have led me to the Ahmadiyya, the True Islam, which put together all the pieces of my life's puzzle, thereby allowing me to see the final painting of Allah that was printed over my life. Allow me to explain.

I was born in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, in a middle class Sunni Muslim family. All the members of my family are devout yet liberal Muslims. Since my parents were working professionals, my upbringing and religious training was mainly done by my widowed maternal grandmother. It is important to note that my grandfather was martyred during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. He was a civil servant, working for the food department of Pakistan, and was shot during the war by "Muslim" Pakistani soldiers while he was praying. I often wondered how a Muslim can kill another Muslim, especially while the other is praying!

The deteriorating conditions of Muslims directly influenced my childhood. I grew up knowing that Islam is true but the Muslims are far from the teachings of Islam. This was very evident in the eyes of my widowed grandmother! She taught me the truth of Islam through her pious example, but her loss reminded me that Muslims are far from the truth. Perhaps that is why very early in my childhood, I had a desire to serve Islam so that the condition of Muslims can be improved. I was fortunate to have a deep sense of serving Islam and serving

humanity instilled in me. At this early age, I developed a habit of praying five times a day and regularly fasting during the month of Ramadhan.

I went from a Catholic school to another English medium school, which taught Islam as a subject. Although my primary education of Islam took place at home, it was reinforced at school through an academic review of Islamic history beginning in the 4th grade.

One of my hobbies was to visit different mosques for prayers since there are so many mosques in Dhaka. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to visit an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque until I migrated to USA. I did, however, once read about the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam in a Bengali newspaper. I asked my grandmother what it meant, and she said that this group does not believe the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet. Little did she know that one day she will follow her grandson to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community!

Due to some unusual family circumstances, I had to migrate to New York with my mother and sister. Here I was confronted with a multicultural society with a variety of religions – as if Allah had prepared a well planned trial to test my love for Islam. Every action of mine (that was never questioned in an Islamic society) was now being scrutinized by the materialistic society of America. Why do I believe in Islam? Why do I pray five times a day? Why can't I date? Allah had not only answered most of these questions in my heart but also had created a desire in my heart to learn more about Islam. This was the beginning of my exploration of the different Muslim groups in New York.

My high school guidance counselor, Mrs. Gabay, was like a Godsend angel in my life. She took care of every minute detail of my academic career, resulting in my admission into Columbia University. As a Christian, Mrs. Gabay had done so much for me than any Muslim brother or sister during my high school years. Deep in my heart, I always thought if Allah admits me to heaven, I would plead for this African American Christian lady to be admitted to heaven with me. But up to that point, the Islam I was taught never allowed any non-believers to heaven.

At Columbia University, I found myself in close affiliation with the oldest Muslim Student Association (MSA) in America. During this time, I came to know of a few brothers who belonged to some Sufi sect of Islam. One of these Sufis told me that Hell is temporary, contrary to most commonly held belief among Muslims. He also explained to me how Allah will judge the followers of each religion from the teachings that were given to them, thus meaning that a Christian has a chance to enter heaven, provided he or she followed true Christianity. Moreover, how can the Most Merciful Allah eternally condemn a

person to punishment for a finite sin? Alas, my dear Mrs. Gabay has a chance, I thought!

I was very close to joining Sufism, when out of the sheer grace of Allah, during that summer vacation, I visited a distant cousin of mine in Los Angeles, who happened to be a devout Ahmadi Muslim. My cousin's husband took me to the mosque in Chino, California, which was my first visit ever to an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque. Although I have visited many mosques in my life, the moment I entered this Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque, I could feel the difference – a peace and tranquility was all over this mosque. I knew in my heart that these people are peaceful and Allah is with them! I met with the Imam of the mosque and held multiple discussions on Islam and Christianity, and my heart hardly opposed any point the Imam had made. His love and care for me was enough to show me the beautiful face of the True Islam – Ahmadiyya – which was hidden from me all these years.

Upon returning to college from my vacation, I started preaching the Ahmadiyya beliefs to my friends at MSA. The scholars among them could not counter any arguments, and the general members were too weak to confront me with their limited knowledge. The natural consequence was that a hidden wall was built between them and me, but my inquisition never stopped. I continued to contact the Ahmadi Muslim Imam from time to time if I had any questions. Every time we spoke, I was moved by his love and affection, as well as by his rational explanations.

I specifically planned the following summer vacation to visit my Ahmadi Muslim cousin again so I can ask the Imam a series of questions that I had gathered from non-Ahmadi Muslim friends over the past year. During this visit, I told my cousin and her husband that I would like to meet the Imam to ask a few questions, and they graciously arranged for the meeting. Before the meeting, I already knew that the Ahmadiyya interpretation was the logical choice because it presented the most rational view of Islam, but I did not know if it was the right spiritual choice for my soul. So during my meeting, I was most interested to know how Islam Ahmadiyya can help me create a relationship with Allah.

The Imam narrated his stories of how Ahmadi Muslims are guided by visions and dreams and also spoke of his personal experience and relationship with Allah. I was completely astounded, as if someone had opened the curtain from the window of my heart, and my heart could now "see" Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. I had no plans to formally accept Islam Ahmadiyya that day but my heart helplessly compelled me to accept the divine

call, as it says in the Holy Qur'an: "Our Lord, we have heard a Crier calling us unto faith, 'Believe ye in your Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our errors and remove from us our evils, and in death number us with the righteous" (3:194). Allah is my witness that from that day on, the rational Ahmadiyya teachings have taught me so much that it is almost as if I am reading a new Holy Qur'an, although I had read it so many times before.

Looking back at my life, the most precious divine gift I received was the blessing of Ahmadiyya, the True Islam. Allah had created such a love in my heart for the Promised Messiah – an unknown person from thousands of miles away – that this love was enough to prove his truthfulness. Islam Ahmadiyya solved the puzzle of my life and enabled me to see the beauty of religion, the beauty of Allah and the beauty of the Prophet Muhammad.

It has been over 15 years since I took the pledge, and these are the years that I felt I truly have been able to help the cause of Islam. I have met many Muslims in my life, but I did not like the way they carried themselves. Most Ahmadi Muslims, on the other hand, understand the true essence of Islam and of Islamic brotherhood. Such truth is what eventually resulted in my mother, grandmother and other family members to convert to Islam Ahmadiyya as well.

Through Islam Ahmadiyya, I have understood the blessings and power of Khilafat. I cannot imagine my life without Khilafat. During an annual convention in Canada back in the 90s, as I listened to the Fourth Khalifa's speech, I felt as if he was looking and speaking directly to me. There were certain points he made about reformation that touched me. It was a defining moment for me as an Ahmadi Muslim, where I was inspired to take my faith to the next level.

The Khalifa represents the true essence of Islam Ahmadiyya that inspires people towards divine love. He represents the purity of Islam Ahmadiyya and has the qualities that true Muslims should really have. If this is what the Khalifa is like, just imagine what the Promised Messiah used to be like; let alone the holiest of the holy, our divine Master Prophet Muhammad!

To further my goal of helping the cause of Islam, MKA has provided me the opportunity to learn the concept of Islamic leadership through serving mankind. This organization is a blessing, as it trains future servant leaders to purify this planet. Allah has blessed me with the opportunity to hold a variety of local, regional and national leadership roles within this blessed Community.

Therefore, think about the surprises that come to your life in various shapes and forms. Are you looking at them and asking Allah what He has planned for you? If you know in your heart that He exists, you should pray that He enables you to solve all the problems and issues in your life.



Hamza Abd Al-Qadir Ilyas
New York, New York

“Men shall help thee whom We have inspired from Heaven.” - *Revelation to the Promised Messiah*

Every time I read the above revelation to the Promised Messiah, I cannot help but recall a prayer I offered some years ago at the South Street Seaport in Manhattan. Overlooking the water on the boardwalk, on a bright blue afternoon in the wake of September 11th, 2001, I stood unemployed, and in search of a spiritual fulfillment I had never known. Not particularly religious, perhaps I surprised even myself when in a fit of despair, I uttered: “O God, if You help me and give me a job, any job, I’ll do whatever You want me to do.” What followed next was the answer to my prayer, the Grace and Mercy of Allah, and my oath of allegiance to the Promised Messiah and Imam Mahdi: Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, and his master, Prophet Muhammad.

Born Wayne Ellis on June 2nd, 1976, I was the second of five boys and one girl. I spent my entire childhood in Hempstead, Long Island in the State of New York. My father’s grandparents were first generation freed slaves. My mother’s were Native Americans from the Cherokee tribe. My grandmother on my father’s side was a Baptist Minister and lived with us. As a result, most of my religious training came from bible study and traveling my grandmother to various churches throughout New York.

By the age of 18, I drifted away from Christianity and busied myself with college life. About a year later, I moved from Long Island to the Bronx to live on my own. At age 22 my father suddenly passed away after the death of my dear uncle. So many members of my family passed soon afterwards that by the age of 25, I was one of the eldest men in my extended family.

At this time, I was married and working at a bank on Wall Street, yet deeply involved with the city nightlife. I acquired terrible habits in search of a lasting enjoyment. After September 11th, 2001, many businesses closed or downsized. I found myself unemployed and unable to find work.

Such was the scarcity of jobs that I found myself competing with people from Ivy League schools for entry level positions. There I was; depressed, jobless, marital problems and my ever increasing awareness of the void within me. I remembered God on that boardwalk, or I should say, Allah remembered me. I offered that prayer and went home. Soon afterwards, I received a call from my former employer after being out of work for 18 months. So overjoyed, I unfortunately forgot the prayer I had offered earlier.

I had a strange dream one night in which I was in the basement of my childhood home, rummaging through a box in search of books. I selected one and suddenly a voice announced: "God is coming." I quickly ran behind a pillar because when I was growing up we were taught that you couldn't see God and live. However, my curiosity got the better of me and I peeked to see what He looked like. He was not there but the stairs that He started to descend were filled with light and illuminated the dark basement I was in. As I rarely dreamt before I found this strange. One day I visited my mother back at my childhood home and as was my habit, I went down into the basement to look through my father's boxes for any interesting books. Lo and behold, I found a copy of the Qur'an!

In those days I spent a great deal of time as a black nationalist, like my father. The spiritual and material condition of people in general and my own people in particular deeply disturbed me. In my search for a solution, Christianity never occurred to me as an option. How could I invite anyone to something I myself could not fundamentally understand? I had enormous love and respect for El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (known popularly as Malcolm X) and studied his life closely. I tried to read an English Qur'an, but whenever I did, it scared me. In fact, the first verse I read was, "How can you disbelieve in Allah, when you were without life and He gave you life, then He will cause you to die. And to Him will be your final return" (2:28). I was dumbfounded and avoided the book.

One morning as I walked into my office, I remembered hearing about a nearby business. I inquired about the business and decided to visit them on my route home. The owners, Imran and Jihad (JiJi), were from Yemen and about my age. I asked about their attachments to religion. They responded it was because of the Qur'an, as God dictated it. "Ah, you mean inspired?" I responded. "No, dictated." We agreed to disagree, and became friends.

Soon after they loaned me a videotaped debate between two scholars, a Christian and a Muslim. I watched the Christian scholar unable to disprove to Qur'an's claim of being "perfect," and remain speechless when shown page after page of various changes in the Bible. I was horrified and began to collect as much information about Islam and the Qur'an as I could.

In a few months I made my rounds to many mosques, and finally accepted Islam at a mosque around the corner from my house. My Muslim brothers from Yemen had given me the name "Hamza" but I wasn't satisfied. I wanted to spend my time in the company of a community and person who exemplified the truth of Islam.

I asked a colleague, Muhammad Malik, a question about Islam. He replied that he didn't know but suggested I call a friend of his by the name of Mirza Ghulam Rabbi Ahmed, who also worked at our firm. The next day Rabbi returned my call and we arranged to meet in queens at the Baitul Zafar Mosque. We didn't talk much about doctrine. Instead, he mostly seemed interested in me and was an impeccable host. After a few visits it occurred to me that there was something I needed to do to be a part of this community known as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I met up with Rabbi at the mosque that Friday. After Isha prayer, he, another elder respected member, Mohsin Mahmud and myself went upstairs to the library. Both Mirza Ghulam Rabbi and I insisted on speaking. He wanted to read what turned out to be the initiation form, and I wanted to declare my adherence to the Community. Brother Mohsin sat in the middle, imploring us both to let the other speak. Finally, I noticed his paper, took a hold of it and signed it, saying, "What do you need, a signature? Fine, here you go!" It was Friday, June 2nd, 2004.

Later that month I attended the Canadian Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention. I had the tremendous pleasure of meeting the Fifth Khalifa. As I passed him, Mirza Ghulam Rabbi paused and mentioned to the Khalifa that I was a new convert. Hadhur pulled me back and said, "Remain steadfast." I returned home from the Convention on cloud nine! I mentioned this trip to a learned non-Ahmadi Muslim associate. I respected him and he seemed to be happy for me. When I told him the name of the Community, he nearly fainted. "Stay away from them," he advised, "they're not Muslim." He explained what I know now is typical anti-Ahmadiyya fabrications. However, at the time it unnerved me. I questioned him and though I did not know very much, I could sense he was not exactly sure what he was saying. I chose to investigate for myself.

Throughout my investigations I saw many dreams and had many spiritual experiences. I was even blessed to see the Holy Prophet Muhammad in some

of my dreams. By the time Ramadhan arrived that November, I was somewhat familiar with Islamic literature and spent a great deal of time in discussion with many people. One night, I began to wonder if I had been too hasty. Within a matter of months I accepted this new religion and culture, but deep down I still held on to some of the superstitious beliefs I had raised with regarding Jesus coming from the sky. After all, it seemed a big claim, and my forefathers died waiting for this moment. If the teachings were true, which I saw clearly, how could the claim be false?

Walking down the street I exclaimed aloud “O God, if this man was the second coming of Jesus, and if he was true, please make it clear to me, help me understand. Don’t let me be a hypocrite.” I went home and went to sleep. I beheld in a dream, a book in front of me verses moving up and down on the page. The book faded away and a voice like the roaring of thunder said: “Number one, Preach there is none worthy of worship save Allah, Number two, Preach there is none worthy of worship save Allah.” This rang repeatedly in my heart and ears. When I woke up, there was no doubt that Allah sent the Promised Messiah.

“There I was...depressed, jobless, marital problems and my ever increasing awareness of the void within me. I remembered God on that boardwalk, or should I say, Allah remembered me.”

After the American Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention in 2004, my firm merged and I lost my job. I dedicated my time to studying the Qur'an, Hadith and any book of the Promised Messiah's and that of his Khulafa that I could acquire. I met the Khalifa again at the Canadian Convention the following year. When he saw me, he remembered me from the previous year! Imam Daud Hanif introduced me as a new convert. His Holiness replied, “When I meet you in your third year, you will no longer be a new convert.

By now I had been out of work for nearly two years and unable to secure any kind of work. Though not accepted to Jam'i'a due to my age, I prayed to Allah that he would help me help His community in whatever way pleased Him. I spent my free time studying and keeping company with Imam Inamul Haq Kauser. By the grace of Allah, on January 9th 2006, we established a mosque in Bronx, New York. My wife had difficulty adjusting to the change in our lifestyle until finally, I was asked to choose. I chose Islam.



Ilyas in the 1010 WINS studio, Manhattan, recording a radio commercial for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of New York.

This left me homeless. I spent part of the day driving a New York City Yellow cab and the other wandering the city, sleeping where I could. It never occurred to me that there was any other choice. I kept a copy of the Holy Qur'an, a slim book of hadith and two books of the Promised Messiah on my person. On many occasions, I would see the Khalifa in my dreams reassuring me. After about seven or eight months, I was asked to be the caretaker at my beloved Bronx mosque. I happily agreed.

One month later, I was offered a position as a VP at a large bank. That summer, in 2007, I remarried and moved to Brooklyn. As quickly as I could, I hired an attorney and legally changed my name to the name given to me by the Khalifa, Abd Al-Qadir Jilani. As it turned out, this was my third year as an Ahmadi Muslim. I received a call from a brother who was putting together a delegation to meet the Khalifa at the UK Convention. Thus, the Khalifa's words to me at the 2005 Canadian Convention rang true. And all praise belongs to Allah alone. May Allah help my family and me serve Islam Ahmadiyya, help us act upon the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, and shade His Khalifa and Community in His Love and Protection. "...And sufficient is thy Lord as a Guide and a Helper." (25:31) Ameen.

"I find in [Muhammad's] character such diverse and manifold qualities as it would be impossible to find in any other man whose biography has been preserved by history. He is a king having a whole country under his control, but never claiming mastery even on his own self, ever taking pride in being the serf of God."

- Dr. Michael Hart

The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History



Ahmed Michael Jones
Portland, Oregon

**"I thought all Muslims were Arabs, rather than the
open religion of races that Islam really is."**

I grew up in Portland, Oregon, with my single mother and grandparents. We grew up quite poor, though I did not realize it. The 19-cent Top Ramen dinners and the fact we never had a car did not give it away. I had a very loving household growing up and was always happy. Religion was not part of our lives, but I cannot say that was a bad thing. Just because you grow up in a "religious household" does not mean it is healthy or righteous. Religion guides you to do the right thing, but it is up to the person to do that right thing.

My grandfather always told me that you have to work in life. Work to be a better person, husband, father, employee, etc. It just doesn't happen because you declare something; you have to work for it. No, we were not religious or even righteous people. But I knew at a very early age that you get out of life what you put into it. And that goes for everyone.

When I was about 12, my mother remarried. My stepfather, Evan Wicks, was a handful to live with at times. He did teach me how to be a man and was a great father, but it was a pretty rocky road along the way. He was the new man in the house, and that is difficult for a preteen to digest. If there was ever a guy who actually needed some religion in his life, some structure, or guidance, this guy was it! I will talk more about Evan later. Don't worry; it ends quite nicely for the old grump.

In high school, I was one of the lucky ones I guess. I had good friends, never drank or did drugs or anything illegal. I was a bit of a ladies man, but really how much trouble could a 120-pound skinny boy get into? I could not stay out past 9pm and all the cool girls wanted someone who could stay out at

least until 10pm. I owe that to my stepfather. He kept a pretty short leash on me and was often quite unreasonable, but in reality it kept me in line. The structure I grew up in formed me into what I am today.

I went to college at Portland State University. It was there that I learned what a “Muslim” is. Until that point, I thought all Muslims were Arabs, a race of people rather than the open religion of races that Islam really is. I befriended some Muslims and learned quite a bit. Part of learning about a religion is getting to know its people. I always hated when people would throw religion down my throat. For me, this was not the way to learn. I learned a lot about Islam just by being friends with these Muslims.

A year later, I met and became friends with a guy who my other Muslim friends would refer to as a fake Muslim. They would get really worked up about it, but I did not really understand that and did not give it much thought. He and I started hanging out, going to basketball games, played sports together and became friends. He eventually invited me to his mosque, saying that it is an Ahmadiyya mosque. I had gone to Sunni mosques before with my other friends for events and dinners, but was now going to an Ahmadiyya mosque for the first time. It was a great experience.

Truthfully, I do not remember any great spiritual moment that day. I only remember great food. I know it sounds bad and I am sure other converts recall their first time to the mosque as a great spiritual event with light hitting them as they walked in, and Allah talking to them. But for me, the only thing talking was that great food and my stomach. It was great! It was so good that when I was invited again, I jumped at the offer and went back for more!

Soon some members of the mosque started inviting me to their homes. This was hitting the mothership for me. Great conversation and yes, great food. This happened every week. I was hooked. Before I knew it, I was coming to the mosque more than the regular members. I was borrowing books and reading them. I read about a dozen books in one month and was learning things really fast. I wanted more. I started to feel at home. It was a very special time. I had yet to tell my father though, for I knew he would be upset since he was a very staunch Christian. I hid it from him for about a year.

I had been going to the mosque for about a year when I heard about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention in Toronto. I went with the local chapter president's family to my first convention, and it was an experience I will never forget. I loved it. When I came back home, I reflected on all of it and was moved. I felt at home with this community. It felt right. I belonged with this community.

Until this point, this was all a secret from my family. In the winter of 1997, without my family's blessings, I took the pledge and accepted Islam and gave myself to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I knew it was right. I became very active, making speeches and doing English readings at the mosque on Sundays. I was involved, I was happy, I was accepted; I was an Ahmadi Muslim. It was right. It was me. But somehow I had to tell my family. I could not hide it forever.

I had no idea how to tell them. I prayed and left it to Allah to take care of me. I planned to tell my father face to face. I prayed before telling him. My heart said everything was going to be okay, and I thought it would easy. I approached him and jumped right out and said, "I'm a Muslim." Before I knew it, I was kicked out of the house. He had kicked me out of the house! Not for one or two hours, but forever. I was out. It was serious. That did not work out quite the way I had planned. I was shocked and hurt. It was the worst thing that could have happened to me. Where were Allah's Blessings? Little did I know, but they would come...later.

"I approached him and jumped right out and said, 'I'm a Muslim.' Before I knew it, I was kicked out of the house."

Lucky for me, I was in college and living on campus at the time. So I was not 100% homeless, but I was still hurt and shocked for months. Evan started to calm down after some time, and I spent some weekends at the house with him. I wasn't allowed to talk about Islam or I would be kicked out again. I still prayed for some kind of peace. Here I was, a new convert, who believed very deeply in my new faith and prayed night and day that things would work out, but they didn't. It was depressing to say the least.

One weekend, I was scheduled to make a big presentation about Jesus and the Bible at the mosque. I was using examples from the book *Christianity: A Journey from Facts to Fiction* by Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the Fourth Khalifa. I was very nervous about making this speech, so my mom told me to practice by reading it out loud. At first I said no because my father was upstairs, and the rule was no Islam or else! She told me it was okay to read. So I read it quietly, but my father was secretly listening to me in the stairwell.

Then he came down. I knew he heard some of it and that I was in trouble. He asked me when I was going to deliver my speech. I told him 1:30pm today

at "my" mosque. Rather than kick me out (again), he asked if he could come. I almost passed out. It was amazing. A true blessing and answer to my prayers! All those prayers for him to accept my new direction, and now several months later, he agreed to listen to my speech at the mosque. And a few months after that, he also converted to Islam! He, too, is a reflection of those blessings and prayers and is now an Ahmadi Muslim.

Allah works in great ways. It is as if my life had all these paths set to follow, just as everyone in this world does. Pray hard to see the right path and Allah shows it to you. You may not know it, but it is there. Like my grandfather said, you have to work for it. I invite you to take that journey and see what happens. I only hope that it works out to be as great of a storybook ending as mine.

In the winter 1997, the same year I took the pledge, I was honored to meet the Fourth Khalifa. I met him with one of my mentors, Mr. Mustafa Thabit. I was so nervous and excited to meet Hadhur. During our conversation, I asked him to give me a Muslim name. Interestingly enough, he said that I already have a Muslim name because I have the name of an angel. I said that I thought I should have a new name, but again he responded saying that I have already got a Muslim name and did not need to change it. Being the loving man he was though, he saw I was a little disappointed and then told me that if I really want a new name, I can put "Ahmed" in front of Michael. So I became Ahmed Michael Jones.

As a Muslim, my heart has opened up to something that otherwise would not have happened if I had not converted so many years ago. The choices I make, the views I have, the way I see the world and I see myself has changed. Islam Ahmadiyya opened my heart in a way I would have been unable to do. I am far from perfect; I make the wrong choices in life as often as I make the right ones. But the biggest and most important moves I have made in my life have been right, with the help of Allah.

I am now happily married and a proud father of two children (a son and a daughter), who are great blessings. We adopted our daughter from China in the summer of 2008. She was born with a cleft palate and cleft lip. When just a few hours old, she was dumped off and left all alone, crying inside a box on the stairs of a Chinese police station in the middle of the night. She was taken in by a medical orphanage and underwent several unsuccessful surgeries in her early months. My wife and I, already blessed with a biological son, felt the calling from Allah to adopt this innocent girl and give her the love, the family and the medical attention she deserved. We knew she was our daughter, not in the womb, but in our heart. She has had several successful surgeries now and

has been a blessing for my family. Our challenges are far from over but with the help of Allah we know that all will be well.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community continues to play a vital role in my life. I have been the Director of Volunteerism in our local chapter of MKA for several years now and am grateful to be able to serve Allah through the Community He has led me to. This is where I belong. This is where we all belong.



Ahmad Michael Jones visiting Rockefeller Center in Manhattan with his son Shaun.

"The height of excellence is that you should strengthen the ties of relationship with the one who severs them, be generous to the one who is miserly to you, and be forgiving to the one who abuses you."

***- Holy Prophet Muhammad
Musnad Ahmad Book of Hadith***



Evan Umar Wicks
Portland, Oregon

“I said, ‘Don’t you ever mention the word Islam or mosque or Muslim ever in this house again.’”

Life growing up in the house of strict Christian Fundamentalists was not always easy. What made it bearable was the knowledge that we were the only ones going to heaven. No matter the good deeds that other Churches did or what they said – just did not matter. They were not part of our group and therefore they were wrong and were doomed to hell.

How little did I know back then. As I grew older I started to have questions, such as, what about people in other parts of the world that have never heard of Jesus, peace be on him? Most of the time my elders blew my questions off or say that everyone has already had the chance to listen to the message of Jesus. From the very beginning, the Preachers told us that we (the church) were following the ways of Jesus who sent his disciples out two by two. While we (the church) were told there were no rules, there were in fact a lot of unwritten rules that seemed to change from district to district. It all depended on who the Preachers (they were called Workers) were in that district. If the reader is interested you can use the Yahoo search engine and look up “Church with No Name” and read about it. Very interesting stuff. They took no name and collected no tithe...or so they claimed. This is how I grew up living and believing.

When I was 25 I did something that was against one of the many unwritten rules. I got married to a woman that had been married before and who had a child from her previous marriage. My parents were so upset that they almost didn't come to the wedding. We got married at the courthouse and had the reception at our home. My mom was okay (sort of) but my dad sat off in the corner pouting. People from the church would come up to him and try and

console him. Not a happy time for him anyway. Here I was, 25 years old, with just a high school education, a wife and stepson. I was completely unprepared. I look back and feel sorry for what I put my wife and stepson through during those first 10 years or so. For the most part, I was also living a life without God. I didn't go to church and didn't feel the need.

One Friday I saw my son getting all dressed up, so I asked him why. He said that he was going to the mosque. "The what?" I asked. He again said the mosque. "What is a 'mosque,'" I asked. He said it is an Islamic place of worship. Well from that moment, the fight was on. I said, "Don't you ever mention the word Islam or mosque or Muslim ever in this house again." I think I scared him at that time and so off he went. He never mentioned it again but would still sneak off on Fridays and Sundays to go.

One day I heard him talking upstairs and out of curiosity I picked up the phone to find out who he was talking to. Dial tone. Hmm. I crept to the bottom of the stairs to listen but I could not make out what he was saying. So up the stairs I went and found him in his room reading from some paper. "What are you doing?" I asked. With a scared look on his face he replied, "I'm practicing my speech for this Sunday at the Mosque." And almost without missing a beat he said, "Would you come to the mosque and listen to it, to give me moral support?" Still curious, I replied yes, and if I remember right, I think he may have passed out – or at least felt like it!

The next day was Sunday and I was nervous and angry at the same time – nervous because I would be going to a terrorist stronghold (my line of thinking at the time) and angry at them for corrupting my son. (The reader should keep in mind that I'm a conservative Republican and at that time a bit naive.) "Who did these people think they were, corrupting my son," I said to myself.

We got there and I was greeted very warmly by everyone. I wasn't buying the routine though because I knew they had something up their sleeve. They started with the prayer first. Weird. And you know that part where they turn their heads to the right and then the left? I thought they were all looking at me. My stepson's speech was entitled, "Has the Messiah Already Come?" Another speech addressed non-practicing Muslims, and the last speech discusses the beauties of Islam, and the speaker read from *The Essence of Islam*. I cannot say what made me start thinking, but on the way home I kept thinking about what I had heard. I turned to my stepson and asked him if I could go with him next week. I can't say for sure, but I think he almost passed out again.

Anyways, I went the next week and then the week after that, and then the week after that. I found out that there was a service on Friday called "Jumu'ah"

and I asked if it was okay to go to that as well. I was now going to the mosque on Fridays and Sundays.

The end of Ramadhan (the month of fasting) was approaching and it was nearly Eid-ul Fitr. One of the members invited my stepson over and was told to bring along his parents. I was still not convinced that these people were not up to something, and so I went, but with the intent that I was going to discuss religion and show these people just how much I knew. And you know that old saying, it's better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid then to open it and remove all doubt? I should have done that.

The host (who is now one of my closest friends) kept saying little snippets that made me question if indeed I knew what I was talking about. Then he gave me the first book I ever read about Islam. It was called *Islam: The Summit of Religious Evolution*. I took the book home and started reading it. The author was discussing the Bible, so I got my own Bible out. The more I read the more I could see that the way I was taught was not the way things truly were. I started to see the Bible in a whole new light. After I finished that book I got a copy of the Fourth Khalifa's book, *Christianity: From Facts to Fiction*. "Holy Cow," I thought. I couldn't believe it. It was from that point that I began to see the light of Islam.

Now there are a lot of things I could point to as pertaining to the reason I converted but the one thing that stands out is our core beliefs. Islam believes in all the revealed religions, which said to me that people from all faiths can make it to heaven. That was one of the biggest differences between Islam and what I grew up with. As I had known it, if you messed up in this life, you went to hell and that was it. No getting out, no reprieve, no nothing. Then one day I read that according to Islam Ahmadiyya, hell is like a reformatory and one day the windows of hell will swing in the wind because hell will have been emptied. Now this I thought was the plan of a Forgiving God. It was at this time that I decided that I wanted to be a Muslim. And you know how sometimes when you make a decision and there is that lingering doubt about if you made the right decision? That did not happen in this case and the next thing you know, I was a Muslim. Okay so now what?

The first person I told was an old friend (who has a bit of a mental problem). I told him not to say anything to anyone. So what did he do? He ran over to my parents' home and told them. OUCH! Well to say they were not happy is an understatement of epic proportions. For the longest time my Dad didn't say anything to me, which was good because I was still studying. And when he did, I was able to hold my own, so to speak. I dreamt one night that I was in my

Mom and Dad's basement with people from their church sitting in a circle. The Fourth Khalifa and I were going around the circle offering each person peanuts from a bowl.

Some years later I invited my parents and members of their church to our mosque. A preacher from their church would speak on the beauties of Christianity while a member of our Community would speak on the beauties of Islam. And believe it or not, my parents came. I didn't convert my parents, but I still saw this as a fulfillment of my dream. Some time later I learned that my Dad had written a friend and told them that we "weren't like other Muslims." Mission accomplished, I thought. I have often said that if we change even one person's mind about what Islam really is all about, then I think it's a success.

In terms of changing my own self, the hardest thing was giving up pork. I ate bacon and eggs just about every morning. Many of you reading this will never know how hard it is to walk into a diner and feel the urge to order a bacon cheeseburger. But after a time it got easier.

When the Fifth Khalifa came to Canada my wife and I made the trip up from Portland to meet him. Everything was fine until I got there. I had a severe allergy attack. I was in the waiting area feeling like I wasn't going to make it. My daughter-in-law got his private secretary to let us move up in line because I was ill. I walked into the room and was immediately overtaken by how big a feeling there was in the room. He was the biggest person I have ever seen. And by that, I mean his presence. He saw how miserable I was and offered me some of his own allergy medicine. His gesture humbled me, as did the way he spoke to both my wife and me. Even though my wife continues to be a Christian, I was very impressed by how welcome he made her feel. I became a big fan of his after that.

While I didn't legally change my name, I did adopt the name Umar as my Islamic name. You see, Prophet Muhammad's Second Khalifa, Umar, was initially very opposed to Islam until he heard the message, just like me. And while I have other favorites from the history of Islam, Umar will always be special to me.

There is a lot more to my story but I will close with a dream related to my decision to accept Islam. I dreamt I was leading the prayers in a mosque. A Muslim and his wife were stood behind me and the man was kicking me. His wife said to him, "Leave him alone, he's doing the right thing." Since accepting Islam I have had more dreams and seen some incredible things happen. But the bottom line is that I feel I have made the right decision and have never regretted it.



Basiyr Rodney
St. Louis, Missouri

**“Prayers offered in childhood often lead to
transformational changes in adulthood.”**

An atheist, an Imam and two foreign preachers are the enigmatic elements to which I attribute my first active steps towards Allah the Exalted. I was 16 and teaching Sunday school in my local church. Mostly I was satisfied with my world – youthful, confident and hopeful. I was in no way uncomfortable with my Christianity. In fact I was often involved in dragging my sometimes non-compliant peers to Sunday morning services – and even evening services when I could twist their arms to attend. Wednesday evening Bible study was a staple and Friday evening youth meetings were one of the highpoints of my week.

One of my personal sources of pride then, and even now, is that I was baptized at the age of 13. My pride in that act of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) as I came to know, was driven by the fact that I felt blessed to have found God – at least as my culture explained it to us from a young age. I was living the type of lifestyle that my elders expected me to live and I was pleased with myself and with God’s plan. More than anything else, I had always been drawn to the mysteries of the spirit and making that connection bolstered my sense of identity as a natural mystic.

But prayers offered in childhood often lead to transformational changes in adulthood. In the absence of a father in my home I experienced some degree of personal struggle in my formative years. I would often sit – in the bathroom of all places – and pray to God to reveal Himself to me (in a home with little private space for a child, a bathroom is the place where you get the most seclusion). It is perhaps these innermost desires that were manifest in my advanced level

literature class when my atheist teacher asked a disconcerting question that changed my life.

It was during what would have been one of our Friday morning literature sessions between Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* that our teacher reminded us of her fundamental premise that humans are deluded. She argued that we think we have some life after death when in her mind there was no basis for such thinking. Human beings she argued are like the flowers. They wither and then they die. There is nothing else. Well of course being a Sunday school teacher I could not stand for such foolishness. Plus a friend from one of my own sister churches was in the same class. We immediately attacked the lady. After my initial shock and first attempts to stuff such untruths back down her throat (really!), I stopped talking and started listening. As the conversation unfolded between my teacher and my classmate, she asked the question: What sacrifices do you make for your religion?

It was interesting because up until that time I was under the influence of the veils and locks of Christianity. One of these veils is the idea that Jesus, peace be on him, sacrificed himself for us – not that we make sacrifices to attain closeness to Allah. Her question immediately opened one of these locks! For the first time I began to realize that if we are seeking closeness to God then it is we who must make the sacrifice, as in all other aspects of life.

This exchange led to some consternation in my mind. I soon became uncomfortable with the hollow notion that one could attain nearness to God by just believing in His creation. For a reason still unbeknownst to me, this exchange led me on a quest for knowledge. I had grown up around a number of Rastafarians so I began to explore their understanding of sacrifice and its relationship to attaining nearness to God. I began to examine every faith in light of this litmus test.

I was in this frame of mind one day, when I had an adventure on a bus in Kingston, Jamaica. Now if you have ever taken a bus ride in a developing country, you will be familiar with the sight of body parts sticking out of the bus. On one such occasion, however, I was on a bus where there was a young man literally hanging off the bus. The driver asked this young man to get into the bus and stop hanging off its side. He refused. Next to me was an elderly gentleman dressed in a long outer coat (Jubba style) and a Fez without a tassel. This older man turned to the youth hanging off the bus and commanded him, "Get on the bus!" The young man hopped into the bus without questioning, just compliance. I was stunned. You see this was a time in Jamaica when the

elderly were afraid of young people. They were often afraid of being insulted or attacked so they avoided speaking in tones that could be even interpreted as confrontational. Yet this man in the funny hat and strange suit had no such fears. I was immediately drawn to him. I drew closer and asked him, "Are you a Muslim?" "Yes," he responded, "are you?" "No!" I said. I just wanted to learn something about Islam aside from what I had read in books. Up to that point I had never met any Muslims. He invited me home.

I waited a whole year to visit with Abdul Marakesh Samad. There was no good reason. I was just suspicious. Who was he? Why was he so quick to invite me home? I even began to inquire about him from people who lived near him. I was told strange stories. One neighboring girl said that she thought he ate cats as the neighborhood cats often go over to the house and are not seen again.

Well, after a year, Allah's grace drove me to fulfill my promise of visiting with Abdul Samad at 48 Coolshade Drive. The man was a true Muslim and as independent as the meaning of his name suggested. At 80 years old he was fit and active, both in body and mind. I was impressed. He explained to me the history of Islam and the life of the Holy Prophet. He then explained to me that I was now responsible (to God) for this knowledge. I accepted Islam. On that bright sunny Sunday afternoon, I walked from Masjid ar-Razzaaq (as he called his home), with a spring in my step and the beginnings of love in my heart for God and his Messenger.

Brother Samad knew of my strong interest in the study of law and felt that I had some degree of insight or perception, as did others. For this reason he offered me the Muslim name Basiyr Abdullaah Naqiyb (One who possesses insight, a servant of Allah, an Advocate). Over the years, I found it difficult to part with my family name. Moreover I felt that being an African in the Americas it was important to maintain the authenticity of my history and identity. Ultimately I adopted Basiyr but kept the other parts of my westernized inherited name.

Though professing belief in Islam had caused some convulsions in my community, four years had passed without any real conflicts. One Sunday evening I saw an advertisement in the paper: "Islam the Religion of Peace or Islam the Religion of Mankind" (or something to that effect). I followed up by writing to the North Carolina address from which it originated. I received a response that included pamphlets and writings of the Promised Messiah. The authors, Nadeem Faizi and Nasir Ahmad, informed me that they would be coming to Jamaica to meet with people to share the message.

During their visit, I journeyed with a companion to meet them. One Saturday afternoon I questioned them for nearly eight hours straight about this Promised Messiah. Years later, brother Nadeem said that he thought that I was a devil himself, who had come to question him! But I was on the path to Truth and would not leave it behind if indeed it was there. Brother Nadeem withstood the challenge and on that same day, by Allah's grace I became one of the foremost of those who submitted to the Messenger's call, InshaAllah.

I am not sure it was a particular line of argument or reasoning that convinced me. The arguments were clear. It was perhaps the aura of the two preachers that made the strongest impression upon me. My companion remarked when we left the gathering that she saw a light travel from one man to the next. As for me, I was attracted to the simplicity and sincerity of the brothers. They traveled from America, the land of comfort and plenty, to sleep on sponges and eat one-pot meals. All for the sake of their conviction to Allah. That moved me. Other than Abdul Samad I had never seen Muslims practice this degree of dedication. I was moved by their qualities – not merely by the arguments. I already knew Islam was true. And I had been reading books by the Ansarullah community about the Sudanese Mahdi so it was not difficult for me to understand and accept the concept of Imam Mahdi. My heart had already been softened by Allah. Abdul Samad used to remind me of the Hadith in which Allah said, "O My servant! If you take one step toward Me, I will take ten towards you." From my early days my desire was to be close to Allah. As I allowed myself to take successive steps, Allah the Exalted led me to Himself. While I was always a faith-minded person, I think the greatest change since accepting Islam has been my recognition of sacrifice in the way of Allah as a means of spiritual purification.

I arrived to the U.S. for the first time in 1996, to attend the annual convention of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. My brothers had arranged for me to travel to Washington and then to travel around the Midwest to see the Community. I was moved by the entire experience and made the intention to spend some time in the Midwest, if Allah would allow it. I returned to the States for educational and personal reasons in 1997, and have remained here since. I now live in St. Louis where I am an Assistant Professor of Educational Technology at a local university. By Allah's grace, I am also working with Imam Azhar Haneef on a special project for the Community.

I am married and have a daughter. By Allah's grace my immediate family is also strong in Ahmadiyya. I have three cousins that have accepted Islam Ahmadiyya. May our hearts not become perverse after guidance has come.



Rasheed Reno
Portland, Oregon

“For the first time I saw science and rational thought being used to explain the life and miracles of a prophet.”

I was born and raised in Portland, Oregon and continue to live there today. My family is also from the Pacific Northwest dating back several generations. My father's side of the family, with only a few exceptions, does not step into a church unless it is for a wedding, or a funeral. My mother's side of the family, however, has many practicing Baptists, although my parents were not religious themselves. Most of my family belongs to the working class, and, unfortunately, there has also been considerable drug and alcohol abuse in my family.

Despite not being a church-going family, my mother felt it was important that I have at least some kind of religious education, so sent me to Sunday school when I was young. There, I was taught a very literal form of Christianity, in which God literally created the world in seven days, less than 10,000 years ago. I found this difficult to believe based on what I was learning in science class. So at a young age, upon learning that the stories of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny were just fairy tales, I also assumed that the stories of the Bible were just fairy tales. By the age of ten, I had become an Atheist. After this I had a very negative opinion of religion and considered people who believed in God to be simple-minded.

I continued this way into my teenage years when I came under the influence of troubled kids and started getting into trouble myself. Ultimately, my closest friend landed in a correctional facility, which became a wake up call for me. I finally started thinking about the direction that I was headed in and realized that if something did not change, I may be headed for the same destination. I decided to look at religion once again. I began reading the Bible and interpreting

it for myself, rather than listening to others, and quickly realized that much of it was written metaphorically, not literally. However, I still had a hard time accepting much of what I was reading and remained unconvinced, although I was finally open-minded to religion.

Around this time I heard about Islam through some rap musicians associated with the Nation of Islam. I looked it up in some encyclopedias and found that it was a simple yet more rational religion than what I had experienced with Christianity and was eager to learn more. I had never before thought of considering a religion other than Christianity, because of my arrogant assumption that Westerners were the most intelligent people, so they must have chosen the correct religion. So ironically, this white American had begun his journey to Islam after hearing about it from the Nation of Islam.

Around this time my close friend, who was in prison, contacted me saying that he had been learning about Islam and was considering becoming a Muslim. This was entirely coincidental and further fueled my desire to learn more about Islam. I read a couple of books and continued to be impressed. I then contacted a couple of mosques to get some more information. The first one I called was the Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque in Portland, which invited me to attend an upcoming seminar on the life of the Prophet Muhammad. I attended the event, which featured Imam Azhar Haneef and the late Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad as speakers. I had a very positive experience and afterwards, I began attending the mosque regularly and continued reading more books.

There were several things about Islam that really impressed me and drew me closer towards becoming a Muslim. First was how Islam is a very open faith. I was impressed how Islam accepted people of all different races and cultures. Equally impressive was its acceptance of other religions and considering them to be part of itself. Second was the strong social and moral code put forth, particularly the prohibition of drugs and alcohol. I had seen many people, including family members, destroy their lives through substance abuse and understood their dangers. Indeed just a short time before, I was headed on a path of self-destruction with my own alcohol use.

But the thing that impressed me the most about Islam is that the conflict between religion and science that had led me to atheism, did not exist in Islam. One of the first books that I read was *Where did Jesus Die?*, and it blew me away. For the first time I saw science and rational thought being used to explain the life and miracles of a prophet, not refute it. So ironically, it was the (Ahmadiyya description of the) life of Jesus that helped lead me to Islam, and Islam that led me to believe in Jesus.

By that time I was offering prayers and practicing Islam. However, I still needed certainty in my decision to become a Muslim and to strengthen my belief in God and Islam, so I began reading the Qur'an and a biography of the Prophet Muhammad. As an Atheist, I had learned how to be very skeptical, and I readily applied this practice to my study of the Qur'an and the Prophet. I said to myself, "If this is not from God, then I should be able to find fault in both." I studied both closely and skeptically and yet was unable to find any faults. I concluded that there was no way an illiterate, uneducated person such as the Prophet Muhammad could have concocted such a grand scheme, written such a profound book, centuries ahead of its time, nor simply "gotten lucky" with all the accomplishments in his lifetime. Believing this to be a big hoax was simply irrational and foolish. And so with this, my faith in Islam was confirmed and strengthened.

While I was now confident in being a Muslim, I did not know enough about its various sects to categorize myself as belonging to any of them. I was attending a number of mosques in order to help me decide which particular direction to take. It did not take me long to learn that Ahmadi Muslims had some different beliefs than others, and that other Muslims rejected Ahmadi Muslims, considering them to be heretics and non-Muslims. This concerned me and I initially felt inclined to turn away from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Having just changed my life and becoming a Muslim, the last thing that I wanted was to be rejected by the very people that I had just joined.

"I had never before thought of considering a religion other than Christianity, because of my arrogant assumption that Westerners... must have chosen the correct religion."

But then I thought about how well I had been treated by Ahmadi Muslims. They had invited me to their events, their mosque, and even to their homes. They had taught me most of what I knew about Islam by providing me with books, teaching me to recite the Qur'an, and taking me to spiritual training retreats. I had developed some genuine friendships with the Ahmadi brothers and knew that they cared about my spiritual and non-spiritual well-being. I thought it would be wrong to turn away from these good people just because others had a problem with them. Moreover, I had not received the same type of reception from the non-Ahmadi Muslims. They did not mistreat me, but I also

did not feel the same brotherhood that I did when I was with Ahmadi Muslims. When I attended their mosques they were mostly indifferent to my presence. There was no one there anxious to teach me about Islam and nobody with whom I had made a close friendship. I felt that I owed it to the Ahmadi Muslims, and to myself, to at least learn about Ahmadiyya beliefs before deciding whether I would accept or reject it.

I thus began reading books about Ahmadiyya beliefs and the Promised Messiah. I studied his life skeptically, just as I had studied the life of the Prophet. I found many of the accomplishments in his life to be phenomenal and again was unable to find fault in his character, or in his teachings. In particular, his writings on the life of Jesus, had a great impact on me. I had actually learned the Ahmadiyya beliefs on Jesus, before I had learned the non-Ahmadi Muslims beliefs and the former were a major factor in my acceptance of Islam. I later learned that the non-Ahmadi Muslims believe that Jesus, was not even put on the cross, but that Allah made someone else look like Jesus, who was mistakenly crucified in the place of Jesus. Then, for no apparent reason, he ascended to heaven. I found this to be ridiculous; Allah would not need to deceive the Jews in order to save his Messenger. How could the Jews be blamed for rejecting him if this was indeed the case? To me, this belief is more far-fetched than even the Christian belief in his death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. This was the same kind of nonsense that had led me to Atheism before and there was no way I could believe it. My belief in Islam had come through rational means and I could not throw that away.

I continued studying Ahmadiyya teachings, including the arguments that the non-Ahmadi Muslims put forward against it. I found the vast majority of them were actually lies. The only argument that I thought had any basis was the issue of the finality of prophethood. The non-Ahmadi Muslims put forward many references from the hadith and the opinions of scholars to show that no prophet could come after the Prophet Muhammad, which put considerable doubt in my mind. But then I read the Ahmadiyya rebuttal. It also included many references to Qur'an and hadith and opinions of scholars. I reflected on this issue for a while. Then I thought that if the non-Ahmadi Muslims believe that Prophet Jesus, will descend from heaven, then how is he not the last prophet? They were very adamant that the Holy Prophet was the last prophet, with no exceptions. But then they still believe that another prophet is yet to come, which is a clear contradiction. Then I thought about what I personally believe, having accepted that Jesus, had, in fact, died and therefore could not return. This would mean that Allah would have to send a new messiah. This

messiah would have to be told by God that he is the messiah that will bring about the victory of Islam. If that is not a prophet, then what is? This pretty much settled the debate for me.

Still I visited the non-Ahmadiyya mosque one more time. The imam gave his sermon on not making friends with "the disbelieving Americans." His message was that we should deal with the non-Muslims in business, but we should not become friends with them. I was shocked. Here I am, a new convert to Islam, the only Muslim in my family, with whom I have always been very close. What am I supposed to do, turn away from them and shun them? "Sorry Mom, Dad and everyone else, you've loved and cared for me my whole life, but you're kafirs (disbelievers) now so I can't have anything to do with you." It didn't take much for me to realize that this was not what Islam really taught and this certainly was not the path that I was going to follow. It was at this point that I came to the realization that Islam Ahmadiyya was the path for me. Moreover, I no longer cared what other Muslims would think about me for it.

A short time later, on March 31, 1992, Brother Mirza Luqman presented me with the initiation form. I read through it and then without hesitation I signed it and was at peace in my decision to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

"The God of Islam is the same God Who is visible in the mirror of the law of nature and is discernible in the book of nature. Islam has not presented a new God but has presented the same God Who is presented by the light of man's heart, by the conscience of man, and by heaven and earth."

***- Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
The Promised Messiah***



Alauddin Ahmed
Charlotte, North Carolina

**“I asked myself, if this was so true,
how come I didn’t know about it!”**

At some point in our lives, we all seek spiritual guidance. In general, seeking guidance is deliberate. Then again, it is also possible to be blessed with true guidance while not even actively seeking it. My journey to Islam Ahmadiyya follows the latter path.

I was born and raised in a liberal Sunni Muslim family from Bangladesh. I came from a large family of nine children. My Muslim upbringing was moderate. My parents taught us the basic Islamic practices and made sure we knew all our basic prayers. I also learned to recite the Holy Qur'an in Arabic. Generally speaking, my parents did not make us offer prayers or observe other practices, except during Ramadhan. Only during Ramadhan did we pay attention to fasting, offering prayers and reciting the Holy Qur'an. In a nutshell, I was a Muslim because I was born into a Muslim family.

From my late teens to late twenties I practiced Islam only when it was convenient for me, as is the case with many mainstream Muslims. I did not consider myself a very religious person; neither did I hesitate to adopt un-Islamic customs and traditions. I always justified my actions by pacifying myself that I was not causing any harm to anyone else.

Life was good – I had just graduated college, started a great job and had plenty of fun loving friends. My friends and family always looked up to me as an honest, kind and caring person. Even though my life was good I felt an emptiness inside. I could never put my finger on it, which bothered me from time to time.

At the time, I was living in Dallas, Texas. There, I met a family from Houston who I later learned were actually from my hometown, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Even though we shared similar cultural backgrounds, there was something unique and different about that family that caught my attention. I knew they were unlike any other people I knew but I did not know why. I decided to keep in touch with them, as I was very curious to learn more about the uniqueness that they possessed.

Not long after I met them, I discovered that this family had a “different” religion. Even though they were Muslims, they were not Sunni. They called themselves Ahmadi Muslims. I thought I knew about all Muslim sects but was I wrong! Out of curiosity I asked, “So what is the difference between you and me?” I never imagined such an easy question could have such a complex answer!

They explained how they were different. It was captivating. I wanted to know more. (And I don’t mind admitting that a person like me, at the time, wanting to know more about religion was highly unlikely.) I could not help but ask more questions. I learned about the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, the death of Jesus, the power of prayers and the concept of the Living God. I saw the radiance on their faces every time they mentioned the name of Prophet Muhammad. I saw the tears of honesty in their eyes as they talked about their Imam and their belief.

All of it was new to me; I was equally fascinated and challenged by this new information. I always thought I knew as much as anyone else about Islam. Yet my friends were very persistent in saying Ahmadiyya was the true Islam. I asked myself if this was so true, how come I didn’t know about it! My mission now was to find out more about this “new” religion and their beliefs. One thing that attracted me the most about this family (and other Ahmadi Muslims in general) was their profound knowledge of Islam, Qur'an and Hadith. I went to their mosque and experienced the unity and brotherhood of the Community. The environment of the Ahmadiyya mosque was much more tranquil than the non-Ahmadiyya mosque I used to visit.

My quest for Ahmadiyya went on. I knew on the surface these people were good but I also knew they could not be right, considering millions of other Muslims did not think they were right. I started a mission to prove them wrong. I began researching Ahmadiyya teachings and ran into countless anti-Ahmadiyya websites. These websites had enormous amounts of negative information on Ahmadiyya and its founder. Before, I had known Ahmadi Muslims were wrong, but now I knew why. I felt empowered and impatient

to share my thoughts with my Ahmadi friends. One thing that did bother me about these websites was their harsh and disrespectful way of attacking Ahmadi Muslims. Other than that, I was okay with the content of those documents – after all, they were all excerpts from the Holy Qur'an and Hadith.

I had a plan I thought was flawless. (Only Allah knew how my own plan would "backfire" and how I would become a part of His plan). According to my plan, I continued to visit the Ahmadiyya mosque and began closely watching them. I continued meeting with my Ahmadi friends and slowly started to challenge them with the anti-Ahmadiyya ammunition I had collected from the Internet. To my surprise, it did not seem to bother them at all. They were as poised and calm as they were before, if not calmer. It was like they knew it was coming. Very confidently they explained to me how it was all propaganda and that these anti-Ahmadiyya campaigns never succeeded in proving that Islam Ahmadiyya wrong.

While answering most of my questions satisfactorily they said if I was truly interested in knowing more about the faith, then I should bring up my questions with the Imam at the Houston Mosque.

One day while I was at their house trying to find answers to my countless questions, a TV show caught my attention. I saw an elderly person with white beard and white turban reciting Surah Al-Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Qur'an; I was mesmerized by his melodious voice and his holy appearance. His radiant face instantly filled my heart with an indescribable sensation of respect. I later learned that this holy man was Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the Fourth Khalifa and Head of the Community. The television show was the Friday sermon airing on the MTA satellite station.

I became extremely eager to learn more about him. I got a book from my friends called *A Man of God*. Undoubtedly, this book changed my view about Ahmadi Muslims and made me more interested in them. I kept on reading; *Invitation To Ahmadiyyat*, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* and *Murder in the Name of Allah* – just to name a few.

The more I read these books the more intoxicated I became. For the first time in my life I started to understand the beauty of Islam. No book I had ever read before explained the beauty of Islam in the way *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* did. These books taught me the true meaning of "Mahdi and Messiah," and that Jesus did not die on the cross. Put together, it all made sense. It was time for me to pray and ask for divine help and guidance in seeking the truth.

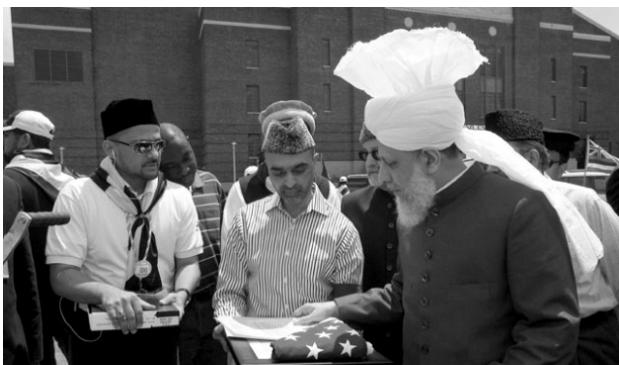
Slowly, I started realizing that everything that the anti-Ahmadiyya campaign was propagating was totally opposite to my firsthand experience with Ahmadi Muslims and their beliefs. I found that critics took a significant number of Ahmadiyya references out of context in order to deceive people. To confirm my understanding, I contacted Dr. Rashid who was then running a website called alhafeez.org from UAE. Upon my inquiry, I received some vague reply from him, which was unsatisfactory and incomplete. His approach to prove the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community wrong actually helped me understand the truth of Ahmadiyya. Little did he know his website was actually working for Ahmadi Muslims, not against them (All praise belongs to Allah).

Ever since I started my research on Islam Ahmadiyya, I began noticing positive changes in my thoughts and behaviors. I did not have that “empty” feeling anymore. I was in peace. I paid more attention to prayers, and most importantly, I grew a fear of God in me. A seed was planted in my heart and a plant started growing from that seed – the plant was my love for Islam. Gradually, I rid myself of those un-Islamic habits that I always knew were wrong but never had the courage to give up before. I continued my prayers.

The hardest part for me was to admit that I found the truth, because the next question would be, “Now what?” I faced strong opposition from my family when I brought up Islam Ahmadiyya with them. They did not even want me to utter the word Ahmadiyya in front of them. It was heartbreaking but it did not stop me from praying and learning more about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

My call was answered. Allah the Almighty granted me enough courage to accept the Truth and to announce it to the world. Alhamdulillah, I signed the pledge and came into the fold of Ahmadiyya, the True Islam in 1997. In the process, I almost lost my family, who thought I had committed the biggest sin of all and become a kafir. But Allah granted me a loving family (the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) and thousands of brothers.

Over the years since I made my pledge, Allah has bestowed countless blessings on me. I have been blessed with opportunities to experience Islam Ahmadiyya by attending the international and national conventions, both in person and on MTA. I met our Fourth Khalifa during the international conventions in 2000 and 2001 (held in England and Germany, respectively). My first meeting with His Holiness was one of the greatest moments of my life; I could not believe that I was standing in front of that holy man and about to touch his hand, the Man of God, the Khalifa of the time.



His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, marking the opening of the 2008 Convention of the USA Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, is presented with the American flag to be hoisted. Alauddin Ahmed (left) is serving on flag detail.

When I first saw His Holiness, the memory of watching him on MTA for the first time came to my mind. I became uncontrollably emotional and broke down. To ease my emotion His Holiness looked at my wife and jokingly pointed his finger to me, laughed and asked, “What happened to him?” Allah also granted me the opportunity to meet our current Khalifa during the U.S. Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention in 2008. Allah also granted me the honor of serving on the “Flag Security Team” on this occasion. During the flag hoisting ceremony, I had the blessed opportunity to hold and pass the American flag to His Holiness. I will cherish this experience for years to come.

Currently I live in Charlotte, North Carolina. I am an Information Technology professional working for a financial institution. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife, Booshra Ahmed, who serves as the National Finance Secretary for *Lajna Ima'illah*, the women's auxiliary organization. Allah has also blessed me with two beautiful boys. My family who almost abandoned me because I joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community took me back with open arms, Alhamdulillah! I have been trying to serve the Community whenever and wherever needed. I am currently the General Secretary and Auditor for our local chapter.

I know I cannot thank Allah enough for enlightening my heart with His divine guidance. I pray that He grants me the ability to serve mankind through His divine Community. Everything that I have been blessed with did not happen overnight. I prayed for it, I worked at it and I continue to do so. It is a gradual and ongoing process; it's not just “instant conversion.”

“Our Lord, we have heard a Crier calling us unto faith, ‘Believe ye in your Lord,’ and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our errors and remove from us our evils, and in death number us with the righteous.”

- Holy Qur'an, 3:194



Daud Ahmad
Racine, Wisconsin

**“I felt like I had to follow him,
and be a part of his movement .”**

I hope by sharing the story of my conversion, I can help someone, and can shed some light on the trials and tribulations of a convert in America, InshaAllah.

I was born in Racine, Wisconsin to Charles and Naomie Anderson. I was named Dwayne Edward Anderson, and have a twin brother named Dwight. I also have two sisters, Annetta and Lori. Both my parents had jobs. My mother worked until I was about 5 years old, after which she became a stay at home mom. My father worked for the Case Corporation for over 30 years, and recently retired.

As children, my parents never made us go to church, although they held the basic beliefs in God, heaven and hell, and so on. My parents did a lot of reading, especially my mother, and as a result all of the children took an interest in reading, and are excellent readers. When I was a child of about 10 years old, my parents bought a book called *My Book of Bible Stories*. It was a children’s book that told the stories of some of the Biblical prophets. I can remember reading this book over and over, and particularly liking the stories of Moses, Job, David, Samson, and Jonah. This book is probably what sparked my love of religion.

Around the age of 15 I began to take an interest in African history. This came about because of a film that I watched in school that depicted Africans in a very negative light. This made me embarrassed to be Black. In my heart of hearts though, I knew that this was not the correct depiction of the African people, my ancestors. Most people knew of the history of Egypt, and there

is some dispute as to whether or not the Egyptians were or are “Black” so I wanted to study a people that were without a shadow of a doubt Black. So I turned my attention to West Africa. I studied the Mali empire, and places like Timbuktu. I studied Sunni Ali Ber and Mansa Musa. Mansa Musa is one of the greatest Muslims to ever live, and I would encourage people to learn his story.

At this time rap music was growing more and more popular, and I started listening to groups that had a message in there music. One such group was Public Enemy. They had a song called “Show ‘em What You Got” in which they named different Black leaders such as Marcus Garvey, Adam Clayton Powell, and Malcolm X. So I began reading about these different leaders. I began with Powell, and then moved on to Marcus Garvey.

Their stories were decent, but nothing that held my attention like the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This book changed my life, and put me on a whole different path. I believe that Malcolm X is directly or indirectly responsible for the conversion of thousands of African Americans to the religion of Islam. From reading this book, my attention shifted from African history to Islam. I was 16 years old at the time, and I declared myself to be Muslim although I really did not know much about the religion. I gave up pork, and began to seek out Islam.

At the time the only exposure that I had to Islam was through the Nation of Islam. They had a little spot in Racine, and would be on the streets selling the *Final Call* newspaper on the weekend. I would get one on most weekends. Around the same time, I had a Sociology teacher named Mr. Lewis who knew of my conversion to Islam through a story in the school newspaper that a friend of mine wrote. Mr. Lewis had a Holy Qur'an that he received as a gift while traveling in the Middle East. He gave me this Holy Qur'an, saying that it would do me more good than him. This Holy Qur'an was a Yusuf Ali translation with commentary.

I had also written to the Nation about my conversion, but was unsatisfied with their response. They basically solicited me for money, and wanted me to buy their products. I did end up buying another Holy Qur'an from them, which was a Muhammad Ali translation with commentary. They also sent me a tape of Louis Farrakhan. Upon hearing the tape, I was done with the Nation, and knew that they were not practicing true Islam.

I began going to school earlier so I could find more books about Islam in the library. I found one called Eastern Islam which described Islam as a religion of peace. This book also had a strong impact on me. The book's pictures depicted the different stories from early Islam. Whenever the Holy Prophet Muhammad

was shown, his face was covered. This impressed me because it showed that the religion of Islam was about God, not the worship of a man.

During high school I worked part-time at Burger King, which also employed a group of prison work-release employees. One of them was a guy named Willie Batchelor, who had converted to Islam Ahmadiyya while in prison. I did not know this, and I had very little interaction with him. One night he was discussing Islam with my brother Dwight, who told him that I was Muslim. Willie then asked what kind of Muslim I was, but my brother didn't know, and suggested that he meet me. Dwight arranged the meeting, and this was my introduction to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

“Whenever the Holy Prophet Muhammad was shown, his face was covered. This showed that the religion of Islam was about God, not the worship of a man.”

When I met Willie, he gave me a prayer book, and the biography of the Promised Messiah. I was deeply moved by the Promised Messiah, and found him to be truthful. I felt like I had to follow him, and be a part of his movement. Willie told me to write to Brother Khalid Walid of Milwaukee. He responded with a letter saying how glad he was to hear my story, and sent me a tape of a sermon by the Fourth Khalifa called, “Addiction to Materialism.” He then contacted Brother Abu Bakr of the Zion chapter, who lived in Racine. Brother Willie was released from prison, and we began spending time with Brother Abu Bakr, who took great care of us, put us to work around the mosque, and also saw to it that we received a proper education and spiritual training. This was around April of 1991. It was May or June when I signed pledge, at the age of 17.

Brother Abu Bakr asked if I wanted to attend the upcoming Annual Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention, and I said yes. He then went to my parents to discuss my conversion, and the convention trip. My parents were comfortable with Brother Abu Bakr and his wife Sister Dhiyya, and were appreciative of their visit. As such they granted me permission to attend the convention. This was a very special convention in that the Fourth Khalifa would be in attendance. The convention was being held at Eastern Michigan University. From the moment we arrived Wednesday afternoon, we worked on setting up the convention site, until early Friday.

We were really exhausted, but at the same time energized by the opportunity to meet the Khalifa. This was the most amazing personal experience of my life. When I entered the room, he gave me salaams, and hugged me. I then requested a new name, so he asked me if I had recently converted, and I said yes. He replied "MashaAllah," kissed me on the forehead, and gave me the name Daud Ahmad. Brother Willie would be renamed Waleed Ahmad. I was on a spiritual high from this experience, and the Khalifa seemed to be glowing in a white light.

Brother Abu Bakr was known as a worker, and as part of his crew we worked much throughout the convention, and also had the opportunity to guard the Khalifa. I knew that I was definitely in the right place, and my conversion was relatively easy. Other people that had an impact on me at that time were Brother Uthman Hakeem from Zion, Brother Jalal Nurrideen from Milwaukee, and Sister Nasira Razaa from Zion.

As a convert, the most challenging thing that I experienced was giving up a lot of the old habits that I had in regards to the norms of the society, such as the attitudes about the mixing of the sexes, and the lax attitude taken in regards to the importance of God. The one thing that I would advise anyone converting to the religion of Islam is that there is no magic pill that will change you overnight. It is a process that takes time, but Islam gives you all the tools necessary to make a true change. Prayer is key. Also, if you stumble along the way or fall, get back up and pray to Allah for strength. Work hard for the Community, and by work I mean physical work around the mosque. Cut the grass, shovel the snow, clean the mosque. This gives you a sense of urgency in the mosque, and makes you feel better about yourself.

To my born Ahmadi brothers and sisters I would say to have patience with converts. Make it your duty to ensure that converts get proper training, and treat them with humility. It was the humility of brothers like Waleed, Khalid, and Abu Bakr that helped me find peace in my choice of Islam Ahmadiyya. May Allah continue to bless the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and may we begin to gain converts in troops. Ameen.



Michael Peterson
Herndon, Virginia

**“On my drive home my eyes fell upon a bumper sticker,
‘God is in control,’ and I knew it would all be okay.”**

I was born in New Jersey in 1984 to Ruth and Michael Leonard Peterson. Being part of a military family, we moved around a lot. I spent the first few years of my life in Germany. As a very young child, doctors had diagnosed me with autism. It was later discovered that the temporary speech impediment I suffered from was only a result of an ear infection and everything soon went back to normal.

When my family moved back to the United States, my parents divorced. My elder sister, Tiffany Hafeez, and I began living with our father in Massachusetts. At first, I did not see Mom too often, but later I began to visit her over the summer. As a baby, I was baptized Methodist. I recall going to a Methodist church and having a strong bond with all of my friends in the youth group, holding overnight stays and doing community activities.

In 2000, I moved in with my mother for my junior and senior years of high school. I graduated from Warren County High School in Virginia in 2002. After graduation, I moved back to New Hampshire to live with my father. My father had remarried when I was a sophomore in High School. I now had a stepmother and two stepsisters. In New Hampshire, I began working at a Burger King while taking courses in graphic designing. When I could not find a job in the graphic designing field, I became a temp agent. While I was a temp agent, I also took courses in Metallurgy and blacksmithing – something I really enjoy doing. In the meantime, my father, an Army veteran, advised me to join the Military.

I contacted a Marine recruiter and completed all the required paperwork and tests. After completing all the various processes, I was ready to be sworn in when recruiters discovered a discrepancy in my paperwork. Needless to say, I left the forms there and discarded the idea altogether.

At the age of 19, I moved out into my own apartment. A little earlier, I had met and became friends with a girl and developed good relations with her family. Life was good and I even entertained the idea of marriage if all worked out well. However, things fell apart a year later. Distraught, I quit a good job that I liked very much, and moved back to Virginia with my mom to get away from my bad feelings.

In my youth, I had been part of the church life, but after high school I did not really stay in touch. Even so, the Christian doctrine was still very much a part of my life.

Upon my return to New Hampshire after graduation, my mom had informed me that my older sister had moved in with a Muslim Family. As I arrived in Virginia, my sister contacted me and asked me to visit her. I decided to go meet her. As divine plan would have it, I was walking up to the doorsteps of Malik Munawar's home. Driving a 1976 Mercury Comet, sporting long hair with a matching long beard and a U.S Marine Corps shirt, having driven over 500 miles while blasting the timeless music of Queen, I pulled into the driveway. As the Hadith states, "Allah says: 'When [man] comes to Me walking, I go to him running," it can be said that I was in for a surprise.

As soon as I walked into the house, everyone said "Assalamu 'alaykum." At first I was taken aback. I did not know what that meant. However, it was soon clear to me that I would not advance any further unless I also said the same thing. This was just the beginning of my journey to Islam. That very day, Mr. Munawar placed an Arabic lesson book in my hand and told me to read it with him. I was not really interested, but out of politeness, I followed. It continued like this for sometime. Before I knew it, I had finished not just the lesson book, but the entire Holy Qur'an. All this before I had even accepted Islam.

In 2004 I found work in Virginia and upon Mr. Munawar's offer, I moved into his home. Here I was in the company of Ahmadi Muslims all the time – unaware of the overwhelming evidence of the truth of Islam Ahmadiyya, and its influence. Mr. Munawar's son and I worked at the same place, so during our drive into work, we would talk about the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam Ahmadiyya, particularly the death of Prophet Jesus.

Although I had learned a fair deal over time, I still refused to accept Islam. On one Sunday morning, during a children's class, I ran across Naseeruddeen

Ahmad Tariq, leader of the local MKA chapter. He carried a Bible which was filled with different colored tabs, marking references in favor of Islam. He tried to logically explain how the Christian doctrine just did not add up. I became defensive, and thinking it as an attack on myself, told him to off rudely. Later at home, I watched a documentary on MTA in which a doctor explained how medical science disproves the death of Jesus on the cross. This influenced me a lot, and I began to see the other side.

A few weeks later, I accepted Islam. What appealed to me the most was logical understanding of the escape of Jesus from the cross. There was no denying the Promised Messiah, for he is the one who brought forth all this evidence.

Accepting Islam was not so easy though. Not only did I have to leave all the beliefs that I had grown up with, I also faced pressure from family. They were surprised and questioned why I would do such a thing. My family wondered, "We raised you in this [Christian] way. Why would do that [convert to Islam]." It was a feeling of awkwardness. For a long time, I was not able to talk to my dad.

Rapidly, I began to understand it all. When I had left New Hampshire, I was the least lucky of men, in regards to work and relations. Now I began working as a chimney sweep for a company in North Virginia. Here, my fellow chimney sweeps, upon learning that I had become a Muslim cracked jokes on me on a regular basis. I used this opportunity to preach the word about the truth of my newly adopted religion. Surprisingly, my hard work did not go too far as I was relieved of my position in the company.

"There's an old saying: You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool God any of the time."

In despair, I drove home from work thinking what did I possibly do deserve such a result. On the drive home, my eyes fell on a bumper sticker of another car, which read, "God is in control." Right then, I smiled and knew it would all be okay. God was indeed in control, as I soon got another job with an Ahmadi employer. Here I was free to preach to any and every passerby; to serve the cause of Islam. Little did I know that this newfound freedom was yet another curve in the road to the purpose destined for my life.

In the summer of 2005, I attended a spiritual retreat at Baitur Rahman Mosque in Silver Spring, Maryland, and learned about the Life Devotion initiative as well as Jami'a – the Islamic Studies college in Canada. I was astounded by the thought of being able to attend a college where I could acquire more knowledge about Islam. Not only would I furnish my ability to preach, I would get the greatest pleasure from dedicating my life to the service of God and spread the message of "Love for all, hatred for none."

After some thought and consultation, I decided to dedicate my life to the service of Islam. In 2006, I began my service by enrolling at Jami'a Ahmadiyya Canada, where I continue to study Islam, Arabic and Urdu to this day. I am eager to serve God in any capacity I can.

On the 20th of December 2007, on the occasion of Eid, I fulfilled the covenant of marriage, marrying the daughter of Mr. Munawar. Marriage has had a positive impact on my life and has also strengthened my faith.

Becoming an Ahmadi Muslim has brought structure to my life. My lifestyle as a Muslim is a complete contrast to my life before Islam. The change was sudden and not without some difficulties. Luckily, I never drank or smoke, stayed clean all my life and also gave up my desire for eating pork before I became a Muslim. Some of the greatest challenges were in praying five times a day and not being able to freely speak with the opposite gender. All in all, I am satisfied with being an Ahmadi Muslim because I know what I believe in is right and I understand my beliefs.

My message to readers is that pleasing others is good and well, but you have to be true to yourself, first. There's an old saying: You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool God any of the time. I found that Islam allowed me to be the person I wanted to be – no one converted me, nor could anyone hold me back. God opened my heart and I followed the path that led me to Him.



Sohail Husain
New Haven, Connecticut

**“Man must let go of false beliefs
in order to accept the truth.”**

I was born in 1972 into a loving and caring family in Nagpur, India. My parents belonged to a small sect of Ismaili Shias called the Dawoodi Bohras. Even now, decades later, I recall vivid images of the Bohra Community's religious practices. Some of them seemed rather mysterious. For example, every so often, during congregational meetings, we would beat our chests with our hands and mourn the martyrdom of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Holy Prophet. The whole gathering would become aroused in emotion, some would shout, “Oh Husain, Oh Ali,” and other slogans. The chest beating would become forceful, and some of the men would go into frenzy. In the end, everyone would prostrate and issue a prayer. This repertoire of activity would occur frequently.

In 1977, a year after my parents traveled to the United States, my brother and I were called to join them in New York City. Despite the smaller size, the meetings of the Bohra Community in the New York-New Jersey area retained their standard of conduct, etiquette, and uniform. As I entered my teens, I began to feel a certain indifference to the arrangement. The sermons were usually the same ones delivered many times over. If there were variations and nuances, they were in the use of metaphors or fantasy-like stories of people being brought back from the dead or water turning into jewels. Consequently, I found little substance in them. The sermons revolved mostly around the tragic events at Karbala or the assassinations of Ali, the Fourth Khalifa of Prophet Muhammad, and his son, Imam Hasan. Thus, we would hear the same themes repeatedly. In addition, I did not know the meaning of my recitations, nor of

my formal prayers. I only knew that I prayed to Allah and read verses that sounded beautiful.

Although I remained interested in attending religious functions, by the time I graduated high school in 1990, I stopped performing my prayers. I resolved that I believed in Allah and would someday resume my prayers if I could figure out their benefit. The following summer passed by in this pitiful spiritual state. I became a college student in the Fall of 1990. I was told that it would be a time of learning new things and becoming exposed to different worlds. I was in store for more than I thought. One day, it happened. As I was chatting with a dormitory mate, a jovial looking boy turned the corner and started walking towards my room.

He approached me and asked, "Are you Sohail Husain?"

"Yes, I am."

"Assalaamu alaykum. My name is Irfan Alladin. I am trying to recruit members for the Muslim Students Association. I found out from your resident director that you were living just one building across from me."

Pleasantly surprised, I returned his greeting and that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship, solidly based on spiritual camaraderie. My dear friend Irfan may not have thought much of this first meeting, but to me, he came like a shining angel from amidst a thick and dark forest. He would talk about Islam and its greatness relative to Christianity, and he constantly mentioned his Ahmadiyya Community and its founder. Together we discussed, and I learned. Among the first lessons was the translation of Surah Al-Fatihah, the first seven verses of the Holy Qur'an. As soon as I heard their meaning, I was entranced. Simple, yet powerful; a stamp of authority and compassion from its Author, Allah Himself. A few days later, I went back to performing my prayers. As each day passed, I felt myself becoming reborn into a new mold. I now wanted to aspire towards piety and felt like dissociating from many of the social practices commonplace at college campuses in the U.S., such as the extreme informality between men and women in social life.

Man must let go of false beliefs in order to accept truth. As I was gradually approaching closer to Ahmadiyya community, I felt an urge to adopt its practices. I changed my mode of prayer to the style of Ahmadi Muslims, which is essentially of the Hanafiyya school. I also could not accept the Shi'a views about the companions of the Holy Prophet, nor could I get myself to associate with the chest beating that took place during "Ashura" in the Islamic month of Muharram. Whereas I found little interest in the sermons delivered at the Bohra Mosque, I found much wisdom at Ahmadiyya gatherings. I was particularly

affected by the Khalifa's sermons. In anticipation of the Fourth Khalifa's visit to the United States, the Community's New York chapter extensive made extensive preparations. It was an exciting time for them as well as for me. I was eager to see him in person. The occasion arose at a question and answer session with non-Ahmadi Muslim guests. A few minutes after the audience gathered, the Khalifa walked briskly into the room at the pace of a sportsman; indeed he was one. It was a marvelous sight. Cheerful, humble, his face shone of a smile which told of piety, love for his guests, and the frequent desire to tell a good joke. That evening I was rapt in attention to his presence. After the program, I was immensely blessed to meet with him personally. His Holiness embraced me and told me that he thought I was an Ahmadi Muslim all along. We sat down, and he told me about his previous encounter with the Bohras. The 10 to 20 minute sitting impressed upon me a deep and long-lasting love for the Khalifa. May my progeny sacrifice for the cause of the Ahmadiyya Khilafat.

The Fall semester of 1991 passed by quickly. I even participated in religious competitions during MKA's youth retreat. I had become fully convinced of the truth of Ahmadiyya teachings. Now all that remained was to join. I knew my parents and family members would be furious if I did. Yet I asked myself if it was not indeed worth everything in this life to receive the benefits from Allah now and in the next life? Or should I wait until things improved with my family? At this time, my mother sent me to various Bohra priests to discuss religion. The account of one of these clergymen is worthy of mention. "Shaikh Sahib," as he was called, was a distinguished professor from the Bohra religious school in Surat, India, who happened to be in New York at the time. My mother convinced him to spend a week at our place not so coincidentally when I happened to be visiting home at the start of my Summer break.

In our conversations, Shaikh sahib asked me whether I accepted a saying of the Holy Prophet about Ali, "I am the city of knowledge, and Ali is its gate." Recalling a similar question posed to Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the Fourth Khalifa of the Promised Messiah, I responded: "Sir, I fully accept this hadith." He smiled. I continued: "You see, the Holy Prophet was both an usher of glad tidings and a warner. He commended Ali for his high degree of knowledge, which Ali had learned from him. Concurrently though, it was a warning for the Muslims to realize who the true spring and center of knowledge really was, that is, the Holy Prophet himself."

"In fact, this carries such an immensely prophetic message for today. It serves as a warning to those who make their center of attention Ali and leave the Holy Prophet aside as some great incomprehensible prophet, whose great

mission was to appoint Ali as his successor (as Shi'as generally believe). They have made the city the gateway and the gateway the city. The hadith is prophetic in that its advice would be necessary today for a great number of Muslims, namely the Shi'as." Shaikh Sahib's smile turned flaccid. This concluded his interest in further scholarly discussions.

The time I spent in reading a few books of the Promised Messiah gave me the impetus for what was to follow. I picked up *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* during the month of Ramadhan, and I could not put it down until it was fully read. About half way through the book, it read:

"How shall we discover that path and how shall we acquire that light? The doors which can only be opened by His powerful hands will not yield to our logic and philosophy. We cannot find the Ever-Living and Self-Subsisting God through our own devices. The only straight path for the achievement of this purpose is that we should first devout our lives, together with all our faculties, to the cause of God Almighty, and should thus find God through God Himself."

I was now resolved. No longer could I wait. Since I considered Islam Ahmadiyya to be the true religion sustained by God Almighty, denying it would be tantamount to denying Allah Himself. Moreover, I could never come closer in meeting with Allah unless I followed His prescribed path. This is a point which I understood long before. Any sane person would come to a similar conclusion. Yet human reason is just the start. Man must supplicate to His Creator for the courage and resolve to follow what is right, despite its consequences. Upon reading the Promised Messiah's writing during that tranquil night, I fervently supplicated: "Oh my Lord, if I am misled by accepting Islam Ahmadiyya, then cause me to fail in my progress as an Ahmadi Muslim and show me the right religion. But if Islam Ahmadiyya is, in fact, the true religion and the true Islam, then, make me hold fast to it and cause me to become a devoted follower." I took the pledge form the following morning.

Accepting Islam Ahmadiyya opened for me, by the Grace of Allah, advancement in virtually every arena. For one, I started to receive a number of dreams, some of which, because I could not relate them to previous experiences, I feel were true. Many of them revolved around the Khalifa of the time. The details of one are worthy of mention. In the Spring of 1992, on a Thursday night, just a few weeks before I took the pledge, I dreamt that I was sitting in a small room with a handful of people, and we were all listening to a sermon delivered by His Holiness. The dream began just as he was finishing the sermon. He seemed pensive and detached. Most startling however, was that his garb was entirely black. Upon finishing the sermon, he walked past

us into another room without making any farewell gesture. The dream ended with me remarking to a friend that it was odd for the Khalifa to have walked by without any greeting. The next day, as Irfan and I headed to Friday prayers in his car, I related the whole dream to him. Later on in the day, we found out that His Holiness' wife had passed away. I immediately wrote to the Khalifa, and he replied soon after that I had indeed experienced a true dream. Sometimes Almighty Allah sends a message of His presence through such phenomena.

As an Ahmadi Muslim, I noted blessings even in my secular affairs. I felt that I was sharper, more alert, and far more focused. I received virtually straight A's in my classes, whereas before I was a B+ student. When I became immersed in religion, I was actually enabled to excel in important non-religious pursuits. I hope I have not portrayed anyone harshly or unjustly in this recollection of my journey towards the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. For one, my parents are dear and loving individuals. Therefore, in ending, I appeal to the reader to pray for all of the participants in this story. Oh our Merciful Lord, may their hearts become softened and may they see Your Light and accept Your Grace. Ameen.



Volunteering with Humanity First, AMC's charitable organization, Dr. Sohail Husain (center) and Dr. Irfan Alladin (right) provide treatment after the tsunami disaster.

“Islam is a religion of tenderness, of love and affection, and of human dignity. Islam honors and respects not only all the prophets but also those who believe in them. It respects leaders of all religions, of all nations, and issues commandments to respect them.”

- **Mirza Masroor Ahmad**
The Fifth Khalifa



Mahershala Hashbaz Ali
Oakland, California

**“As I followed the motions of the brothers - standing,
bowing, prostrating - I began to cry.”**

I was born Mahershala Hashbaz Gilmore in 1974. My family is from Oakland, California and I was raised as a Christian. My mother actually became an ordained minister while I was in college. My aunt and grandmother were also ordained ministers, so the commitment to religious studies on my mother's side of the family was quite obvious.

After graduating from college, I moved on to New York University, where I started my graduate studies. New York is such a melting pot of culture, ideas, art, theology – not to mention the monolithic architecture that is a constant reminder of one's smallness – that you cannot help but think of the higher power.

In grad school I began to question my belief in the divinity of Jesus, and more importantly, why I was taught, told, and instructed to pray to Jesus, instead of God. In my mind God created Jesus, so shouldn't I pray to the Creator? It was hard to admit, but when I questioned why I believed what I believed...I could only respond with, “That's what I was told.” I did not have proofs of my own, or true knowledge that I could confidently stand on. And for many of the fundamental questions that I had, where there were gaps in my understanding, I was often told, “That's where you have to have faith.”

This is what led me to search beyond what was once comfortable for me. The first thing, and perhaps the hardest part of my journey, was the shifting of my prayers. At the end of one's prayer in Christianity, you are instructed to say, “In the name of Jesus, Amen.” I changed this to, “In God's name, Amen.” This was hard, because all of my conscious life I had been ending my prayer

the same way, and I was scared that I could get punished for the questions I was struggling with, and even perhaps deviating from something that I once believed to be true.

I began reading different books: *Seat of the Soul* by Gary Zukav, which was about reincarnation, being one. I went to a Baha'i meeting in San Francisco. I even went as far as beginning to believe that religion was created by man out of fear of death. But before this belief took hold, I was introduced to Islam.

My schoolmate, Amatus Karim, invited me to the mosque. At the time, I had no idea that there was a difference between Ahmadi Muslims and other sects. I just went to the Friday prayer. As I followed the motions of the brothers – standing, bowing, prostrating – I began to cry. But they weren't tears of sadness, or even joy, for that matter. I could not understand a word of the prayer, but ironically, they were tears of understanding. For the first time in my life, I knew where I was, spiritually speaking.

A week later I went to another mosque in Brooklyn – a non-Ahmadiyya mosque. Again, I did not know there was a difference. What I did know was that Muslims believed in One God, and Muhammad was a prophet, as was Jesus.

So at the non-Ahmadiyya mosque, the prayer began, and once again I began to cry. After the prayer, a young man turned to me and asked, "Are you Muslim?" I responded appropriately: "No." He then asked, "Do you want to be?" I replied, "Yes."

I told Amatus what had happened and she called her father, respected Brother Abdul Karim, in Chicago, and respected Ali Murtaza, also in New York.

It took me some time to actually understand what the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was. I was still coming to understand Islam in a very basic and general sense. And to be quite honest, I was concerned that it might be a cult. There was a large picture of the Promised Messiah in the office of the Queens mosque. It made me a bit cautious. I thought the Promised Messiah may have been worshiped in the Community, and that was the last thing I wanted to be a part of, especially considering my Christian upbringing.

I converted to Islam in my final year at graduate school, and I began to work soon after graduation. As my work is often cause for travel, I was unable to settle into a community, or even a specific mosque. I was in Wisconsin for a month or so, Washington D.C. for about three months, back in New York for a spell, and then I found myself with a bag, and very little money in Los Angeles.

While in Los Angeles I began to study with some mainstream Sunni Muslims. I assume they were Sunnis – again denominations were not as important to me then. I just wanted to learn and understand the faith and practice. But it was my time with some brothers in L.A. that led me to the Ahmadiyya Community. The non-Ahmadi Muslim perspective was not practical in certain matters, making Islam feel difficult to the point that I developed a fear of the religion, which I feel Allah would not want anyone to have. For instance, I mentioned I travel often, and was concerned about prayer times. I asked, “What do I do when it is time for prayer and I am 30,000 feet in the air, on a plane?” The non-Ahmadi Muslim brother responded, “You lay your rug down in the aisle and make your prayer.” But I had read in the Ahmadiyya Muslim prayer book that one could pray seated if necessary, or in travel (which turns out is a sunnah of Prophet Muhammad). So now I had opposing views.

“In grad school I began to question my belief in the divinity of Jesus, and more importantly, why I was taught, told, and instructed to pray to Jesus, instead of God.”

I attended a non-Ahmadiyya convention over one weekend. It was quite small, maybe 15 to 20 people. During my time there I do not remember the Holy Qur'an being opened even once, but there was great emphasis on hadith. That troubled me because I know that some hadith are unreliable, but the Qur'an is irrefutable, so I found myself confused. I was told that Muslims should always eat on the floor, and must eat with three fingers – no utensils, no napkins. I was then instructed to lick my fingers clean. So I began thinking, in order to be a true Muslim, I would have to excuse myself from the table, sit on the floor of a restaurant, eat with three fingers, and then lick them clean...or else I was not obeying the Holy Prophet.

I learned my prayer from audio tapes, and by mimicking photos I found in both Ahmadiyya and non-Ahmadiyya prayer books. A non-Ahmadi Muslim brother who stood out as being quite learned at that convention I attended actually corrected how I was holding my hands while standing upright in prayer. I specifically remember being afraid to say it, but I went on and asked, “Well, why is this the correct way, what sect is right? I've seen people hold their hands different ways. Some even leave them at there sides.” He responded by saying, “The way I am showing you is correct.” I was really bothered by that.

And as that feeling in my stomach began to tell me that this was wrong, my eyes fell on the words that seemed to glow from the back of a vacuum cleaner: "REFER TO YOUR MANUAL FOR INSTRUCTIONS." I immediately thought of my Ahmadiyya Muslim prayer book. As crazy as that might sound, it meant something to me...I knew it was a sign!

A year and a half later, on June 23, 2001, I joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community at the 53rd Annual Convention in Silver Spring, Maryland. It was through reading *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat* by the Second Khalifa, specifically the portion on prophecies, along with very simple, logical answers by Brother Ali Murtaza, to what I had believed were difficult questions, that convinced me of the truth of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

I met the Fifth Khalifa when he visited Toronto a few years back. I was so nervous that I did not give proper salaams! I have also written him a letter. I realize that I have done myself a disservice by not cultivating a stronger relationship with His Holiness. I pray my relationship will go beyond prayers and develop into a consistent correspondence. All praise is due to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.



Luqman Malik
Chino, California

“I happened to be driving past the mosque and felt this sudden urge to go and find out about Islam.”

I was born Eddie Mendez, the second youngest of eight siblings (Rosa, Ruben, Ramon, Letty, Richard, Lucy, Carol, Jose), in Chino, California. I spent most of my life in Baldwin Park, a suburb of Los Angeles. I grew up in a rough environment, surrounded most of my years by many of the problems associated with the barrio. Both my mother and father were a source of guidance and inspiration for me, preventing me from much of the trouble others my age fell victim to. My mother was a devoted housewife while my father worked in the aerospace industry. They immigrated to America in the 1940's.

Our neighborhood was primarily Hispanic, with a strong Mexican presence. We were raised in a Catholic environment and attended church on a monthly basis. My parents also wanted to preserve our heritage, mandating Spanish be spoken at home. I still remember every Sunday eating this delicious Mexican dish called *menudo* (somewhat akin to lentil soup). We also celebrated what is known as *Quincenera* (Sweet 15) – a rite of passage where a girl is recognized as being a grown adult and should become more conscious of her duties to God.

During my pre-adolescent years, I did get into some fights, but sports helped me become a disciplined and mature young man. In fact, sports have been a big part of my family's life. My father was a talented soccer player and played for the Chivas club team in Guadalajara (near Mexico City). Despite his passion for soccer, he saw I had a special gift in baseball and urged me to pursue it. With his direction, I was able to win a place on the American International Baseball team as a 10-year old. Out of 2,000 kids, only two made the team from

California – me being one of them. Paired with my passion for baseball was my focus on studies – my loving mother insisted I do well in school.

I completed a two-year middle school course in one year. In high school, my baseball career blossomed. As a freshman, I won the starting pitching position as a walk-on to the Sierra Vista High School varsity team. My academics actually flourished during this period; grade requirements and constraints that baseball placed on my schedule demanded I become more disciplined and organized. I had an excellent earned run average (ERA) of 1.5 over my high school career. My best pitch was my curveball, and my fastball was in the mid 80's. I went on to receive All-League Pitcher honors for Southern California.

After high school, I attended community college, again winning the starting pitching position as a walk-on. My record was 11-1 at the end of my freshman year. By the beginning of my sophomore year, professional scouts were openly recruiting me, in particular the Detroit Tigers. Then, tragedy struck: I got bursitis, and later tore my rotator cuff, ending any hopes of a major league career.

At this point, I fell into a spell of depression and began questioning my faith. Nothing seemed to make sense. I was still attending college and decided to take a world religions course out of interest. I met a very pleasant mannered Muslim from Afghanistan during this period whose name was Tariq. I learn about Islam from him as well. Then 9/11 happened.

I still remember driving home from school that day, wondering why there was so much unrest in the world. I asked God what is the purpose of creating us if we keep on behaving like this to one another. I went through a catharsis of sorts, asking God, who is right? I said that my mother would always say “One day we will all be under one umbrella and believe in all the prophets of God,” but how is this possible with all this going on?

All my Muslim friends came from affluent families. Islam fostering terrorist ideology just did not add up. As fate would have it, I happened to be driving past Baitul Hameed Mosque in Chino and felt this sudden urge to go in and find out about Islam. I did not know anything about the Ahmadiyya Community at the time.

So I enter the mosque and meet an American convert from Hawaii with an easy smile, brother Abdul Ghaffar. I asked him bluntly, “Tell me, what’s going on?” Our conversation began around noon. Ghaffar slowly went through all the basics of Islam, then moved onto the concept of jihad, then explained how terrorism and Islam are incompatible. We talked about religions that came before Islam as Ghaffar painted a holistic picture of religion, explaining that

Islam was the final component in God's master plan to bring man a complete code of life. I can honestly say that all the answers he gave me made complete sense.

During our conversation I heard this loud cry and wondered what it was. Ghaffar told me it was the *adhaan*, or call to prayer. I found it very peculiar; it was melodious and generated a sort of energy in my body. I watched Ghaffar and other Muslims pray and then asked questions about how they prayed afterward. I also spoke with other members who were very accommodating, taking my number so that they could invite me to dinner. Imam Inamul Haq Kausar, invited me for dinner to his house that night with his entire family. We talked about many things and it was a very friendly atmosphere. Before I finally left, at 9PM, Ghaffar gave me a ton of books.

That night I read through *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* and *Jesus in India*. After reading these books, along with *Christianity: A Journey from Facts to Fiction*, various other pamphlets, and the Qur'an, I felt Ghaffar was absolutely right – this is like a big puzzle. Two days after our first meeting, I went back to visit Ghaffar.

Ghaffar was happy to see me and we went over my questions. He gave me a piece of paper and told me to hold onto it. The paper was the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's initiation form. Ghaffar told me to pray to God for guidance in whatever manner I wished, but to prostrate before Him. I did this and after a week, an intense connection with Something was kindled inside of me. I felt both excited and a bit anxious because I had never known these feelings before visiting the Chino Mosque.

During this period I also began to develop an intense admiration for Prophet Muhammad. Here was someone who had the ability to motivate people towards true faith in droves. His difficult upbringing as an orphan reminded me of the challenges Jesus Christ faced as well. I said to myself, if Jesus Christ were to return, most people would certainly reject him because this is the pattern with prophets. So too was the case with Prophet Muhammad, a man whose teachings were a fulfillment and confirmation of my mother's statement, "One day we will all be under one umbrella." Here was an unlettered man who successfully preached racial and gender equality, universal brotherhood, and a belief in all of God's prophets. This is what religion should be like.

I signed the initiation form on December 21st, but did not go back to the mosque until January. I wanted to be sure about my decision. I also weighed the decision with my Catholic past. In the end, I decided that just because I was brought into this world as a Catholic did not mean I had to remain a Catholic

– my decisions had to be based on rational thought and satisfy my intellect. That evening, I stood before the congregation and declared *Shahaadah*, that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger.

“As a Catholic I visited church once a month - now I pray five times a day.”

Upon accepting Islam, I wanted to change my name. I wanted people of my heritage to know that I am a Mexican as well as a Muslim. So I prayed to God to guide me in the matter. My appointment with the county office was scheduled for a Monday. On the Saturday prior to the appointment, I performed Tahajjud (very early morning, optional) prayers at the mosque. Afterward, I just happened to open up the Qur'an to Chapter 31, which, among other things, speaks of the relationship between parents and God. It explained how one must respect one's parents to the utmost, but it is towards God that man owes his ultimate respect. I felt this subject matter fit my situation perfectly and I adopted the name of that chapter, Luqman.

Accepting Islam Ahmadiyya has changed my life. My character and demeanor have become far more refined, a fact to which even my family bears witness. As a Catholic I visited church once a month – now I pray five times a day. And the love of the brothers! I have gained an extended family by joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I remember one dream where I was sitting to the left of the Fourth Khalifa. I still remember him turning to me and gracing me with this magnetic smile. After that I woke up and felt complete joy and it is a joy I still experience.

What I most enjoy about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the blessing of Khilafat. It is our Khalifa who keeps us on track regarding the fundamentals of Islam and provides leadership and structure on a global scale to his beloved Ahmadi Muslims. The effect of the lack of Khilafat can be seen in the rest of the world, which is sadly deprived of this spiritual treasure.

My meeting with our present Khalifa at Canada's 2004 Annual Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention was amazing. The atmosphere in “Peace Village,” the neighborhood surrounding Baitul Islam Mosque in Toronto, where thousands of Ahmadi Muslims reside, was unbelievable. Ahmadi Muslims from every walk of life had gathered in Canada just to see their spiritual father and kiss his hand.

When meeting His Holiness, he affectionately put his hand on my shoulder and asked me my name, hometown, and where my family was from. I was in awe that I was speaking to a man with such an immense presence and glow. I still remember at the end of the talk he said, "I will keep you in my prayers and we will talk soon." It was a very emotional experience for me as I was so happy to meet His Holiness, but so sad that my family was not able to share in this experience. Allah has blessed me with a loving wife and son, Jasim, neither of whom were present then. However, I also met His Holiness in 2008 in Maryland. He remembered me from our meeting in Canada four years ago, and as I had my son Jasim with me, he also gave him a pen.

While my visit to Canada was blessed, I will always remember my journey to Qadian, India, the birthplace of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and home of the Promised Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. I visited all of the holy sites and also had the blessed opportunity to meet his grandson, the late Mirza Waseem Ahmad. Even before accepting Islam, I loved hearing the adhaan. As a Muslim, I love to call the adhaan – you can say it is a passion of mine. While visiting Qadian, I had the opportunity to perform adhaan at the Friday prayer service of Masjid Aqsa, the mosque of the Promised Messiah!

Here at home, it truly is a blessing to be part of the well-structured and devoted group of men called Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya. Through MKA I have a strong relationship with brothers all across America. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to God for the grace He has showered upon me.

"To achieve, or hope to achieve peace, you can only struggle and strive in the cause of goodness and peace - there is no other way; and this is the most important, central and pivotal point for establishing World Peace."

***- Mirza Tahir Ahmad
The Fourth Khalifa***



Atif Mian
Chicago, Illinois

“The greatest gift of Ahmadiyya teachings is that they introduce you to the true concept and reality of God.”

I was born in Nigeria in 1974 but grew up mostly in Pakistan. Looking back at my life, I have to admit that I have been extremely fortunate in many ways. I had the most loving and caring parents who sacrificed a lot for the education and proper upbringing of their children. I was the youngest in my family, with three older sisters. So you can say I was spoiled once by my mother and three times by my sisters.

I would describe our household as moderately religious. My mother constantly taught me the value of good morals. I remember having a sense from a fairly young age that I was expected to do the “right thing,” i.e. tell the truth, respect elders, not be extravagant, and so on. My parents paid great attention towards their children’s education. They commuted long distances for six years just so we could go to school in Lahore where education standards were higher.

When I was finishing my high school, my father encouraged me to apply to the U.S. for college. Luckily I got admitted to MIT and joined there in the fall of 1993 as a freshman. Life at MIT was quite difficult in the beginning. Classes were tough, language was a bit foreign, and culture was very different. There were adjustments to be made at many levels. It was perhaps the result of exposure to alternative ways of life, or perhaps the natural consequence of a maturing mind that I began to ponder seriously about the pre-suppositions of life that a child grows up with.

I had been raised as a Muslim with a strong emphasis on the belief in God. I had never questioned what I had been taught thus far, but this now turned out

to be an uneasy compromise. Should I believe in Islam simply because fate had me born into a Muslim family? Why should one take religion seriously when its primary determinant seems to be the flip of a coin that decides which family one is born into? Why should one put so many constraints on life because of a God that may or may not exist?

The questions were many, but I struggled with finding acceptable answers. At the same time the conventional understanding of Islam seemed more and more intolerant and irrational to me. Muslims who advocated on behalf of Islam enthusiastically split hairs when it came to religious dogma, and yet seemed oblivious to the basic tenets of justice, tolerance and human civility. For example, otherwise sane looking people would actively support the idea that anyone who chooses to leave Islam should be condemned to death. I was beginning to be put off by religion.

It was around these early years in college when I found out that an old friend of mine from high school, Hamid Sheikh, was an Ahmadi Muslim. I had known him for over eight years but never knew that he was an Ahmadi Muslim. My impression of Ahmadi Muslims at that time was quite negative, formed largely by the general social attitude towards Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan. In my mind Ahmadiyya Community was some weird cult devoid of common sense. Therefore, when I found out that a good friend of mine was an Ahmadi Muslim, I was quite surprised.

At this point, however, I was less interested in the finer details of differences between Ahmadiyya Islam and Sunni Islam teachings. I had enough trouble trying to understand religion at a basic level and did not care much about complicated sectarian discussions. So I badgered Hamid with some general questions about God, religion and the purpose of man's creation. We had some discussions, and Hamid gave me two books to read: *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues* by the Fourth Khalifa, and his biography, *A Man of God*.

I had been searching for a logical and humane approach towards religion but was disappointed with what I had found thus far. However, reading *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues* was a totally refreshing experience. I was not yet ready to say that I believed in a particular religion, but I remember saying to myself after reading the book that if there ever were a religion worthy of following, it must look like the one described in that book.

I loved the way the Fourth Khalifa approached religion. He spoke with the precision of a scientist. He always began with "first principles" and then gradually built his case through the rules of logic. There was also a deep sense

of love, compassion and humanity in whatever he wrote or said. It is hard to express it in words, but I fell totally in love with his personality.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community began to provide me with the answers that I had been searching for. But conviction of the heart and mind are two separate issues. There were always more questions that I could have asked. At what point do I draw the line between skepticism and belief?

I did not know the answer to this question. I was also perturbed by the idea of praying for myself. How could I do that if I were not willing to call myself a believer? Wouldn't that be hypocritical? Even selfish perhaps? And then there was the chicken and the egg problem. If one needs to have faith to pray sincerely, and must pray sincerely to have faith, where should I begin?

My solution to these conundrums was that I could only pray to a possible God. I would pray that if You are truly there then guide me to what is right and what is true. In my heart I already had the suspicion that the truth might be Ahmadiyya. Therefore, afraid that I might stay away from it because of the social sanctions against it, I would add that I was willing to pay whatever price it took to find and accept the truth.

Over the next few years, I continued to read whatever I could on Islam Ahmadiyya. I did not discuss this much with others. I preferred to study on my own instead. The web was a great tool for me. Alislam.org, the Community's website, was just beginning to develop and I must have been one of its most voracious consumers at the time. My greatest attractions were the "Q&A" sessions conducted by the Fourth Khalifa, as well as his sermons. I could spend hours listening to him.

While I found the message of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community very attractive, I was extremely repulsed by the attitude of orthodox clerics towards the Community. How could they lose all sense of humanity and prevent Ahmadi Muslims from practicing their faith in Pakistan? How could man become arrogant enough to decide who is a Muslim and who is not, as a matter of law? It was because of such attitudes of orthodox clerics that I never took them seriously in their allegations against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

After finishing my undergraduate education at MIT, I decided to pursue a doctorate in Economics, also at MIT. I finished my PhD in 2001 and moved to Chicago to start my first job as an Assistant Professor at University of Chicago. While I was in Boston, I had stopped going to the local mosque for a long time because I could not pray behind an Imam who condoned an intolerant interpretation of Islam. There was an Ahmadiyya mosque near Boston but it

was far and I did not have a car. So now that I had a car in Chicago, I thought I should look for an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque.

Once I found the local Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque in Chicago, I began going for Friday prayers. I might have done so for the rest of my life without becoming an Ahmadi Muslim. I had already acknowledged that the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam was the only one that made sense. Why then go through the hassle of conversion and all the social conflicts that come along with it? After all, what is the line beyond which one says, "I believe"? The human mind is a specialist when it comes to making excuses.

However something changed in March of 2002. I cannot say how and why. The Holy Prophet Muhammad said that the key to a person's heart is in Allah's hands. So one day Allah changed my heart. There is no other explanation for it. I felt a strong desire that I must sign the initiation form. I had to do it. There was no other option for me anymore. Like a kid in the candy store, I had to have it.

My parents were quite unhappy at my decision to become an Ahmadi Muslim. This trial has been the most difficult for me since the last thing I ever wanted to do was to upset my parents in their old age. It is all the more difficult given how much they have done for me. But life ultimately owes its existence to God, and I pray that we may all find peace in Him.

While there are sacrifices in the path of a convert, these are overshadowed by the fact that man at his core is a moral being. There is nothing more rewarding than being truthful to one's conscience. The greatest gift of Ahmadiyya teachings is that they introduce you to the true concept and reality of God. Everything that is pure and good is to be found in God. Therefore one can never be truly spiritual unless one tries to get closer to God by developing attributes that are in His likeness: developing compassion for humanity, being sincere, treating everyone with absolute justice, and saying the truth even when it may have negative immediate consequences. When one struggles to become better only to attain closeness to God, God never leaves such a person alone. This is the ultimate lesson of Islam Ahmadiyya and the ultimate gift for a convert.

I have been fortunate to serve the Community in various capacities. One of my greatest joys has been the many friendships that I have formed through MKA. I have had the privilege of meeting many remarkable individuals whose sincerity, desire to serve humanity, and selfless dedication to work tirelessly for the good of others, leaves me awestruck. At a time when religion has been distorted to create mayhem in many parts of the world, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community provides a true picture of what Islam is supposed to be.



Borey Bashir Song
Silver Spring, Maryland

“I saw everyone greeting and interacting with such kindness... I knew that this was true brotherhood.”

I was born in July of 1981 in Cambodia. My parents had become refugees while fleeing from the Communists who had taken over the country. The Khmer Rouge wanted to create a new utopia for Cambodia and decided to “cleanse” the entire country. Millions perished. Many were detained in labor camps. For many months, my parents were among them. When the Vietnamese forces arrived, however, my parents were able to escape with several others and made it to a refugee camp at the border of Cambodia and Thailand. My family stayed at the refugee camp for many months before we were sponsored to come to the United States. By the grace of Allah, they wound up in Hawaii.

I grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii. It is a very beautiful place to spend your childhood. My parents thought so too. They decided to put their roots down, and raise their family in Hawaii. My parents were Buddhists back in Cambodia, but they converted to Christianity after coming to America. They believe God had delivered them from the communists. As my parents were now Christian, I also naturally grew up with the Christian faith. My parents even enrolled me in a Christian private school, where I was able to study the faith extensively as well as other religions. However, I felt like something was missing.

Like most young teenagers, I enjoyed spending time out with friends and family and meeting new people. Since I grew up in Hawaii, I naturally came to love the ocean. I spent a lot of time at the beach either spear fishing or free diving.

During college, however, I became restless and had a sudden urge to leave the island. I had a tendency to get into a lot of trouble. Hawaii being a small

island, you come to know everyone – good and bad. I began hanging out with the wrong crowd. I knew if I stayed any longer, I would wind up working with the wrong people, so I decided to get away. I wanted to see what else the world had to offer.

I left Hawaii and came to Silver Spring, Maryland to stay with my aunt and her family in 2003. It was here that I first learned about Islam. I was working at a Fitness Center as a personal trainer. One day, I overheard a spirited debate among a few co-workers about religion. My co-workers came from many different faiths: Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Catholicism and Islam. The debate lasted throughout the day and eventually it seemed they were discussing the inaccuracies among each other's faiths. I found myself listening to my co-worker who spoke about Islam Ahmadiyya!

I used to wonder why I had listened so attentively, and eventually came to understand that I too had questions about Christianity. I felt guilty about questioning my faith, but I was impressed with the reasoning she had applied. I also noticed that she did not insult other religions; rather she respectfully listened to others and then presented the Islamic perspective. I asked her about Islam, and after a brief introduction to the faith, she said I should speak with her brother and invited me to attend Friday service at Baitur Rahman Mosque.

I met my co-worker's brother, Rizwan Khan, and a few other brothers at the mosque. At first I was nervous about attending, but when I actually went to mosque, I felt...comfortable. Rizwan introduced me to many people and everyone seemed friendly and personable, not just with me, but with each other. It was such a different experience from going to church. At church, everyone sat on benches and dressed their Sunday best. It was very formal.

This experience was different. First off, everyone was seated on the floor. I remember thinking to myself, what a humble way to listen to a sermon. After Friday service, I saw everyone greeting and interacting with each other with such kindness. I knew right then that there was something different, something special, about this faith. I knew that this was a true brotherhood. I wanted to be a part of this unity. I wanted to know more.

Rizwan and others gave me literature in stages, over time. I continued attending Friday services and met with members of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya, the young men's group. Rizwan and his family also invited me to their home to help me study and explain the truth about Islam Ahmadiyya. The more I studied, the more I came to respect and understand Islam. I gradually came to love it. I eventually understood that all the world's religions would

culminate and give way to a perfect religion. That religion was Islam - the pinnacle of religions.

In July of 2005, I accepted the conditions of initiation. I decided to accept Islam. I remember the most prominent reason I decided to accept Islam Ahmadiyya was because it is logical and it makes sense. It corrected misinterpretations and inaccuracies. It filled in the gaps and answered all my questions that Christianity could not. For example, God says in the Qur'an that He has sent messengers unto all peoples. The Promised Messiah testified that not only was Jesus a prophet, but also showed how Buddha and Krishna were also true prophets. I was comforted in knowing that I would not be abandoning my spiritual heritage; rather, I would be embracing an all-encompassing faith which respected all of God's holy personages. I can go into a lot more detail, but I remember thinking, here is the Truth. Here is a spiritual family and brotherhood I want to be part of. I believe in Islam and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

I remember telling my parents of my conversion. They were not happy at first – after all, they were firm believers in Christianity. But I remember asking them, “Mom, Dad: were you not first Buddhists before becoming Christians? Was it not because you believe God delivered you from harm, that you accepted Christianity? I believe that Allah guided me here, thousands of miles away from home, for a reason, just as He guided you thousands of miles away.” My mother and father now understood. I remember my father saying, “We raised you as best we could and gave you enough knowledge for you to make your own decisions. If this is your belief, then believe whole-heartedly.”

“I began hanging out with the wrong crowd. I knew if I stayed any longer, I would wind up working with the wrong people, so I decided to get away.”

The funny thing is that now when I speak with my dad on Sundays, he is on his way to church, and asks me if I also went to “church” today. I have to keep reminding him that it is a mosque and we listen to our sermon on Fridays! He chuckles and says no matter what religion you believe, you have to attend the sermons. I am eternally grateful to Allah for opening my parents' hearts. They have now read literature on Islam and Ahmadiyya beliefs back home in Hawaii. InshaAllah, they too will be guided.

There are many changes in my life after accepting Islam. To mention every one of them would mean writing a novel. However, the greatest change has been in spirit. I am now more conscious of the way I think and the way I act in life. I suppose you can say that I feel more self-aware.

Whenever possible, I spend my free time volunteering with MKA. Other than that I spend my time between work and family. I have started learning Urdu and Arabic. I hope to master it so that I may also converse with my brothers in their native language.

Allah has been kind to me. Looking back to the time when I left home, I feel blessed that Allah guided me to Maryland where I resided less than a mile away from the mosque. He has provided a wonderful wife and in-laws who are my second family. I feel continually blessed that I have continuing support in my life, from the Community at large and MKA. I am eternally grateful.



Israh Nurulhaq Siddique
Los Angeles, California

“It was like I was looking at a blurry picture all my life, and the Messiah was able to make it crystal clear for me.”

I was raised in the Inland Empire area of Los Angeles, which is about 30 miles away from the greater Los Angeles coast. I was raised by my mother in the Jewish faith. As I grew up, I used to go to the synagogue and learn the Torah. I was taught very strong monotheistic values and that it was wrong to worship Jesus. But really, all my life, I was more spiritually inspired and tried to maintain a personal relationship with God. I grew up around people of different faiths: Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, and so on. So I was exposed to many different religions, which really shaped the way I looked at matters of faith.

When I was 13 years old, I began searching for what was the right religion. The thing that made me look outside of Judaism was the fascination of other things and cultures. I spent a lot of time studying other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. I even knew some people that were Muslim growing up – a Persian friend from Iran, and another from the Nation of Islam. One specific topic that always fascinated me was Jesus. Who was he? Some say he was God. Some say he was the son of God. Some say he was a prophet. Some say he was a holy man but not the messiah. Growing up around Christians and Catholics, that was a big deal, and I was always intrigued about Jesus as a person and his status according to God. With Islam, I felt very comfortable with God’s relationship with Jesus.

A couple of Sunni Muslims I knew began taking me to their mosque. I found Islam to be a natural fit for me. At about the age of 15, I kind of became a Sunni Muslim, but I was conflicted while growing up. I wanted to live like a

normal American kid without a care in the world, but at the same time I always felt this guilt that I understood what a life of a Muslim should be. So I decided not to call myself a Muslim since I was not ready to commit fully, even though Islam was the lens through which I was beginning to look at the world.

I know this may sound cliché, but things changed for me after 9/11. It was a big deal for me to see this happen because, for some reason, I always feared that something catastrophic would take place in America. I was almost anticipating something like that to happen. When it happened, it scared me that God could smash something in a second. We can never escape the wrath of God. So I felt like I needed to submit to God and not ever receive His wrath. So after 9/11, I started reflecting spiritually and decided that it was time for me to worship God. At this time, a Christian friend of mine invited me to go with him to his church. This is the first time in my life I had ever been in a church. That visit affected me in a very profound way. There was singing and people were getting emotional. I felt out of place there, and it made me want to be with people that were more similar to me. I felt the need to go to a mosque regularly and perform prayer there.

I went to a mosque which happened to be close to my house called Baitul Hameed. I had no idea it was an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque, and I didn't even know what Ahmadiyya meant. At that time, I believed as mainstream Sunnis did. I knew about Muhammad, Moses, Adam, and so on, but I did not know about who this messiah was. The first person I met was the Imam of the mosque. I noticed the picture of the Promised Messiah so the Imam told me about him. I decided to study up on him to see what was behind his teachings. I was critical of what he said and wanted to study this faith to disprove it. My understanding of other false claimants to the office of Imam Mahdi (the divinely guided leader awaited by all Muslims) throughout history was that most, if not all, of them were either disgraced in this life or assassinated. I had already studied people like Fard Muhammad, Muhammad Ahmad, Bahaulla, etc., who claimed to be the Mahdi, and all of them met with destruction. Jesus said in the Bible that you can judge a tree by the fruit it bears.

But as I read about Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, I did not find this pattern of destruction anywhere. If anything, I found a group of people who called themselves his khulafa, and none of them were also ever disgraced or assassinated. So that had an impact on me, that Allah had saved all of them through all these years. I knew nobody could speak on Allah's behalf falsely. Then I started reading the Promised Messiah's writings. I started with his book, *Jesus in India*, and read it all in one day. When I initially started learning

about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's theory of Jesus, it made sense to me logically. Once I read this book, though, the truth was beyond a shadow of doubt. It was like I was looking at a blurry picture all my life, and the Promised Messiah was able to make that picture crystal clear for me. After reading this book, I thought to myself that this person has to be true. I had already known about mainstream Sunni Muslims' theory about Jesus, but I never did understand what the point would be for Jesus' likeness to be cast on someone else, who would then be crucified in the place of Jesus. With the Ahmadiyya belief though, everything made perfect logical sense, without taking away from the respect of Jesus as a prophet.

I was continuing to go to the Baitul Hameed Mosque to offer my prayers, and I would speak with the Imam when I was there. We began to build on our previous discussions and talk about any new questions I had. I finally decided to take the initiation and officially join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. It was a life-changing moment. Emotionally, I felt at peace and happy. It was almost for no reason, but I just felt really good, in a way I had not felt since I was a child. I think I was different from other Jews because I didn't come from an Orthodox Jewish community. Many people are culturally Jewish instead of spiritually Jewish, but I was exposed to a lot of different cultures and was not just engraved in a Jewish community.

As a result of this balanced experience, my family was always very supportive of me and my decision. I was always taught that Ishmael was to the east and Isaac was to the west, which meant Jews and Muslims were cousins. So it was not a foreign concept for my family. For my mother, it was no difference. As far as spirituality, Islam's relationship with Judaism is a lot closer than Christianity. If I would have become Christian, then there would have been some issues within my family. I had more problems with friends I grew up with. They were surprised that I was Muslim now and could not come to terms with it. It hurt at the beginning, but I was able to meet other people and make new friends, which helped me get through that phase. My understanding of Islam was not complete when I first became a Muslim. Now, as an Ahmadi Muslim, I have a more comprehensive understanding of Islam. This new understanding has helped me to change my lifestyle in different ways. I now truly enjoy my prayers more than ever. For so many years, I felt so isolated from everything. I felt as if I was different from everyone else. But within the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, it feels great to know there are so many others that are like me. This is my family. It feels good to know that one has that family.

After joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, I still faced some challenges. The biggest was simply the lifestyle of a red-blooded American man. I feel that in this society, debauchery is promoted. As a young boy, raised in this popular society, you are taught that a true man conquers women. The hallmark of a man is the means by which he gets women. So it was a challenge to switch that mindset and understand the relationships between a man and a woman. Through the Ahmadiyya teachings, I found answers to so many unanswered questions, and it helped me to understand this world. Some people go their entire lives without finding answers, and I feel so fortunate to have found the truth within Islam.

“Islam was the only religion to explain why there are so many different religions in the world.”

Some people ask why God would send different people with different religions and then wonder why we are fighting with each other. Islam was the only religion to explain why there are so many different religions in the world. Islam explained that all faiths are a continuation of the same message. Islam encompasses all teachings. You do not lose anything with Islam. You gain so much more. It explains where Jews came from, where Christians came from, and how they made mistakes, departing from their original teachings, which were indeed from God. With other religions there is no explanation. It is just this way and that is it. For me, Islamic teachings are intelligent and make sense.

You should think of this life as a pastime. You are just like a traveler under a tree. There is another world beyond this world. People are trying to plan for their future in this world, but the only real future is the Day of Judgment. This is what we all should be saving up for. Do not just accept what was passed down to you from your parents. Find out why you believe what you say you believe. If you call yourself a Christian, that's fine, but what do you stand on that makes you feel confident in your faith? Do you know what the Bible says? Many people just accept it without truly knowing. If you care about your spirituality, find out why you believe what you believe and where it comes from.



Michael Morris
Boston, Massachusetts

**“What comes from the heart,
goes right into the heart.”**

I was born and raised in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. Roxbury is the inner city, where the crime rate is high and there is a lot of low income housing. Mostly Black and some Hispanic make up its residents. I was the only child my mom, Sandra, had. She and my grandmother, Willa, raised me. While we were Christian, we were not really active. I went to church once in a while, like on Easter or what not, but that's about it. I was a pretty good kid for the most part. I was did well in school; I always had advanced classes in elementary. My upbringing taught me to be kind, respectful, and decent.

In 1990, my mother got introduced to Islam by a Sunni Muslim, converted and got married to him. The three of us then moved to Baltimore. I was 16 and it was my freshman year of high school. This is when I first learned about the tenets of Islam and fell in love with its concepts – the One God, prayer and so on.

That said, Baltimore was rough. Even though I had been introduced to Islam through my stepfather, I still was not practicing its teachings. I got involved with the wrong crowd, made a lot mistakes and went from being an excellent student to ending up not finishing high school. My girlfriend and I had two children together, and I decided to move in with her, which my parents disagreed with greatly. But I went to work to try to support my family because I thought that was the responsible thing to do. We tried to make it work for the kids, but eventually, we parted ways as friends. We were young, and without the guidance, I was doing the best I could.

In 1997, I came back up to Boston, for a fresh start. I was able to get my GED from North Shore Community College in Lynn. I found work with my uncle, doing metal refinishing. My grandmother gave me her apartment in Lynn as she moved in with her significant other. So life seemed to be on the upswing. I was working nights, which meant I had no social life. After a while, I got a little depressed, probably because I didn't have any friends, I did not go out, and so on. I ended up quitting that job. All work and no play...I was really feeling the effects of it.

That's when things started unraveling fast. I began telemarketing for a home improvement company, and went from working a lot and having lots of money, to working too little and having too much time. I started partying, hanging out with the wrong crowd (again)...basically, looking for love in all the wrong places. I was running on my own juices; I had no guidance. Eventually, I lost the apartment and moved back in with my mother, who had also returned to Boston. I also tried somewhat to keep a long-distance relationship with my children in Baltimore, but life was not turning out the way you would have thought had you known that little boy named Michael so many years ago.

Over time, here and there, I would get little reminders of Islam. I would see Muslims on the street, say salaams...it just took a long time for me to find my way back to Islam. It took until 2006, when I met Brother Rafiq Lake of the Boston chapter. I had gotten into trouble with the law and was luckily sentenced to his place of work by the courts. Brother Rafiq works for a Therapeutic Community (TC), a boot-camp style program where people can get back on the straight and narrow.

Brother Rafiq asked me if I knew about Islam and I said yes, I had been introduced to Islam when I was sixteen years old. Then he asked me if know Ahmadiyya. I said negative, I had never heard of that. So he said if you are willing to learn, I will teach you. He also said Ahmadiyya challenges you to do your own research. Read up on it, come up with questions and ask me. So I did just that. I read the Ahmadiyya commentary of the Qur'an, the Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam, and a few small booklets, and it all made sense to me.

But what really won me over was Brother Radoiq's kindness. Never mind his arguments, it was his kindness and genuine nature that made the real impact on me. What comes from the heart goes into the heart. I was eager to learn more and to start attending Friday service, but TC, the program I was a part of, was real strict. You had to earn your leave. The TC had these seven principles on its walls, which were a guide by which we were supposed to live our lives. Brother Rafiq challenged me to memorize all seven of them, and if at some

point in the future I had, I would earn leave. Now it was not easy to memorize even one of them, especially for some of the brothers in TC because they came in there with their memory cells all burnt up already. But because my life was so empty and I was so motivated to get closer to Allah now, I memorized all seven principles in one week, Alhamdulillah.

At that Friday's staff meeting, I got up and recited all seven principles from memory and everyone was very impressed and even applauded my effort. They did not think I could do it in one week, so they had not issued me a pass for that Friday, so I would end up having to wait until a week later to attend Friday services. But I finally made it to Friday prayers with Brother Rafiq, and it was a great feeling.

I continued my study of Islam Ahmadiyya and continued going to Friday prayers whenever I could. In the summer of 2006, I took the pledge. I was ready to begin living my life according to the teachings of Islam. I read several books while I was at TC – *Conditions of Bai'at*, *Jesus in India*, *Where did Jesus Die?*, to name a few. But it was *The Essence of Islam* by the Promised Messiah that had an amazing effect on me. *Essence* is so powerful that I had to put the book down and walk away from it for a minute, just because it was so overwhelming. No one had ever described God in the way the Promised Messiah had.

My first full experience in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was Ijtema, the youth retreat, being held in New York. This was unbelievable for me. A bunch of brothers rode down together in a van, discussing matters of spirituality, joking and playing games. In the van we had doctors, IT guys, Harvard students, cab drivers – people from all walks of life, as brothers. I was feeling a camaraderie like I had never felt before. Everyone was so kind to me, but they didn't even know me.

“No one had ever described God in the way the Promised Messiah had.”

It was the same, multiplied by a hundred, at the Ijtema itself. I had never met a community of people like that before; kind, knowledgeable, full of humility. The conversations that were being held were captivating. With the spiritual intensity that was there, it was easy for me to be convinced that Ahmadiyya was the True Islam. I mean I was already familiar with Islam, but to witness the togetherness, all the programs, and experience the unity in prayer, I came back from Ijtema 100% certain that this was where I belong, Ahmadiyya the True Islam.

I came from a place where you had to have a tough face on all the time. To show love and kindness was equated with weakness. So to be in a righteous group, it just rubbed off on me, and I wanted to be righteous myself. I came back from Ijtema with an eagerness to increase my own righteousness. I tried to pray more, to help others, and to keep reading up on Islam.

Since the pledge, life has gotten much better. I got a good job, with an Ahmadi brother as a matter of fact, as a merchandiser and a salesman – just like the Holy Prophet of Islam. I finished my time at TC and started renting a room for a while. Then, by the grace of Allah, I got married to my wife in 2008, and the two of us now live together. I work hard but I still manage to attend Friday service regularly, alhamdulillah. I attend events here and there, but not enough, primarily because I work on Sundays.

Still, I faced a lot challenges upon joining the Community of the Promised Messiah. The discipline required to be a Muslim is not easy. Things like avoiding mixing with women, and the materialism of the world, which is common in American society, was tough, but over time, I was able to overcome these challenges. Being Ahmadi made it easier to develop the good virtues I already used to have, but that were buried for a while – like kindness, humility, and service to others.

Three years into the Community, I am still here and I am doing good in prayers. It's the fear of Allah that keeps me on the right path. The Qur'an talks about how Allah can set a seal on a person's heart if they keep doing wrong. When I read that, I really felt it. Now I am afraid that Allah may seal my heart if I ever deviate from His path. Aside from the fear Allah, it is blessings such as the hospitality of the Community, the truthfulness of the Promised Messiah, and Khilafat as a uniting force and source of guidance that have kept me in the Community.

As I look back now, I have changed in many ways because of Islam. I no longer have a bad crowd around me and I have the community available to me at all times. That has made a huge difference. I no longer do the things that got me into trouble because Islam prohibits them. I spread the message of Islam Ahmadiyya whenever I can. I work hard now, I try to help folks; I host foreign exchange students through the Worldwide Exchange Program, and have even brought my students to the mosque. I also speak to kids in the Artistry for Humanity program in Boston, who make t-shirts, artwork, etc. I tell them about all the struggles I have had in life, and if, by teaching them something, I can help even one of these kids, then all the pain and suffering I went through will have been worth it.

Still, becoming a good Ahmadi Muslim is a process. I know I can do better but at times, my laziness gets the better of me. Having a patient, open Community has enabled me to progress without pressure, at my own pace. I want to get more active in the Community of course, do more to share the message with others, memorize the Qur'an more, and increase my spirituality. I also want to help the world through charities like Humanity First and in other ways.

Allah has a way of giving you what you need, brothers. My life has had ups and downs, and for a long time I had no guidance. Because of that I lost everything I had. Today, however, by the grace of Allah, I have so much to be thankful for, and I am even more motivated to do good works for the sake of Allah. I pray all of us remain on the right path, Ameen.

“Until a man truly endeavors and works hard, he cannot attain the treasure of divine understanding which Islam contains and which brings a death upon the life tainted by sin.”

**- Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
The Promised Messiah**



Hashim Mumtaz
Long Island, New York

**“I had never witnessed such clarity of mind
and such logical arguments.”**

I was born to an Ahmadi Muslim mother and a Sunni Muslim father, nine years after Pakistan declared the Ahmadiyya Community “non-Muslim.” I grew up in the Rawalpindi-Islamabad area of Pakistan. I now live in Long Island, New York and am training in internal medicine.

I am the youngest in my family, with two older brothers and an elder sister. My siblings and I were considered Sunni Muslims because my father was Sunni. During my childhood, General Zia-ul-Haq’s tirade against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community rose. Extremists ensured that people heard that Ahmadi Muslims were infidels and should be persecuted. However, extremists could not invade the relationship between my mother and me. In this relationship, my mother introduced me to the Promised Messiah. She did not force it on my siblings or me or attempt to secretly preach behind my father’s back. Rather, she made us aware that another group existed and not in the way that so many people were led to believe.

Since childhood, I had been drawn towards religion. I cannot remember a time that I missed a prayer or fast since the age of 12 or 13. Throughout my childhood, I read books explaining basic Islamic beliefs such as prayer, fasting, etc. In school, I performed well in subjects concerning Islam and the Arabic language.

In retrospect, I can say that our Islamic teachers taught us incorrectly from the very start. They taught the translation of the kalima as, “There is none worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is His last prophet.” My Islamic teachers explained that because Ahmadi Muslims did not believe

Muhammad to be the last prophet, they were non-Muslims. I later learned that the Arabic makes no mention of “last” and this word had been implanted in the translation.

At 16, I visited an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque for the first time. My aunt took me to Baitul Hamd in Rawalpindi. Everybody attentively listened to a speech broadcast from England by the Fourth Khalifa. The speech marked the global launch of the Ahmadiyya satellite channel, Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA). He stated that any religion not from Allah would never survive. The Promised Messiah’s Community would only achieve great expansion as the prophecy stated: “I shall cause thy message to reach the corners of the Earth.” I found this man to be no ordinary person. I had never witnessed such clarity of mind and such logical arguments. The mullahs had always been confusing in much of what they said. They had taught us about black magic and said that even though Muhammad was the greatest prophet, his enemies affected him by voodoo tricks. This experience greatly helped me learn that Ahmadiyya teachings are the truth.

Over the next few months, I learned more about Ahmadiyya beliefs. This new knowledge fit more with Islam than what I saw around me in Pakistan, a supposedly Muslim nation. Every new piece of knowledge came with the realization that Islam’s beauty was best described by this man known as Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and his Community’s scholars. I read *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, *Noah’s Ark*, and parts of *The Writings of Ahmad*. *The Great Commentary of the Qur'an* touched me the greatest because it helped me understand that the Qur'an is not just magical and mythical stories about olden times. Rather, the Qur'an was reality and continues to be completely relevant today. Additionally, I was impressed by the Promised Messiah’s use of only the Qur'an to explain the three stages of the soul in *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. This opened my eyes to the wonders of the Qur'an, Islam, and ultimately, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

However, the road had rough patches as well. Several hurdles existed between me and the Ahmadiyya Community. When I was 14, I decided to offer my Eid prayers in an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque instead of our usual Sunni mosque. I made this decision because I had read that if you are an Ahmadi Muslim, you should go to a mosque where the Imam has the same beliefs as you. My father had become so upset that he threatened to spend Eid with his relatives and never return to us. This was a very difficult time for me. People may say, “Oh, your father has different beliefs, it should not be too hard to disconnect from him.” Although I was developing different beliefs, he was still

my father. It hurt to see him in that state. I gained strength in knowing that the early Muslims remained steadfast when their families turned on them. My experience thus far had no comparison.

Once I gained interest and knew more about Ahmadiyya beliefs, I realized how much my family members, teachers, and peers insulted the Promised Messiah. My relationships with my father's family became strained when they found out I had a growing interest in the Ahmadiyya Community. They constantly asked me about my faith, hoping that I would turn away from the Community. To declare myself an Ahmadi Muslim would not only threaten my relationship with my father and his family, but also threaten my relationships with childhood friends and teachers.

Fortunately, these realizations did not deter me from the truth. I pushed to sign my pledge in 1998 because the Ahmadiyya Community's realistic beliefs convinced me and the charismatic personality of the Fourth Khalifa impressed me. My mother invoked her motherly instinct and tried to tell me to make a more matured decision later in life. But I saw the truth – it stood directly in front of me, staring right into my eyes. At 17, I accepted Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the Promised Messiah.

It is difficult to explain and incredibly cliché to say, but after joining the Ahmadiyya Community, everything became clearer. I had a firm understanding in my beliefs and actions. In my prayers, I knew exactly what the Arabic meant. Even the Qur'an became like a newly discovered treasure. I no longer grew weary of reading a foreign tongue, rather the Qur'an opened up to me and I to it. I was able to understand the Qur'anic teachings and see how they related directly to my life. But I did not see this treasure pointing just to me; I saw the treasure shining forth as a solution to the problems faced by other faiths, cultures, and nations.

Soon after signing the pledge, I fortunately became active within the Community. The youth, collectively known as MKA, were very open and welcoming. As a large amount of Khuddam, lived in Pakistan each youth leader had three or four assistants. I had the opportunity to serve as one of the assistants. Through this, I gained a satisfying experience of achieving a true jihad, a true struggle, for my religion. I knocked on doors and met many Ahmadi Muslims as I collected money for the beneficial social programs. I felt fulfilled even though I had plenty of work to do as I was in my first year of medical school. This volunteer work helped me to maintain my life so that I would not be sucked into the secular world. Many of the Muslims I knew always had a guilty feeling of not fulfilling their jihad due to their distorted image that had been shaped by Islamic extremists.

During my service, I had constant motivation to do good works and stay away from sins. This motivation helped me when the Khalifa requested more Ahmadi Muslims to take part in the initiative outlined in the Promised Messiah's book *The Will*. After reading the book, all doubt in my mind about sacrificing 10% of my income in the Way of God was erased. In 2006, I pledged myself to this initiative.

I currently serve as the youth leader for the Long Island chapter. I try to lead by example and help the youth see the sunshine if their vision becomes clouded. I also try to spread the truth wherever I can. In 2008, one of the people I had told about Islam Ahmadiyya accepted it as the truth. I felt humbled to know that people in America have not closed their minds to religion.

I had the pleasure of seeing Ahmadiyya teachings practiced in two parts of the world, the East and the West. In America, there is no difference in the teaching, of course. However, there is much difference in how Western Ahmadi Muslims have to adapt. In Pakistan, many teenagers do not have part time jobs. Here, many teenagers have part time jobs while attending school. It becomes difficult to go to the mosque or attend meetings at a moment's notice. In Pakistan, inactive Ahmadi youth were not approached; rather their parents were approached. Their parents would then counsel the inactive member. In America, we live in an individualistic society. Thus, everyone is his own person. As a youth leader, I strive to make a personal relationship with every brother and then ask him personally to participate in the community service work we do.

“I gained my strength in knowing that the early Muslims remained steadfast when their families turned on them. My experience thus far had no comparison.”

Society plays a role and takes its toll. American Muslims have to traverse a tough path, littered with obstacles like sex, drugs, and alcohol. In Pakistan, the prevalent issues were lying, poor attitudes, and backbiting. Although those are concerns, they deal with people's own beings, whereas the problems faced by the youth here deal with outside influences. However, this does not mean the Ahmadi youth are left on their own to go astray. The American Khuddam are strongly united and have shown they can be both Muslim and patriotic Americans by volunteering in soup kitchens, adopt-a-highway programs, and other community service all across America. They show important aspect of being Muslim, which is to be loyal to one's nation.

The Khuddam helped to show me that, through unity and organization, anything is possible. Most youth, including non-Ahmadi Muslims, have no organized system to maintain any interest in religion. So the mullahs have to either force it on them, or make Islam extreme and group it with false promises and attractions of this world that have no use in the next life. We as Khuddam are able to live a modern life and not feel guilty about it, since we can continue practicing our faith.

Being a member of the Khuddam has brought me even closer to Islam. In this fast-paced world of material wealth, I have seen Khuddam energetically sacrifice their time and money in helping each other and helping spread truth to many. These Khuddam, like me, are not just sitting around with nothing to do. We are all incredibly busy in our lives; however, these sacrifices have helped make our busy lives even more productive. Through this, we learn and understand the importance of time.

Looking back, I see that there had been plenty of opportunities to not move towards the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. With that in mind, I see that I could have easily been deprived of this blessing if I had given in to my father's beliefs and the extremely malignant anti-Ahmadiyya environment in Pakistan. I pray that Allah keeps me on this righteous path and continue to give me opportunities to serve His Community throughout my life.

“Not one among you truly believes until he likes for his brother (in faith) what he likes for himself.”

***- Holy Prophet Muhammad
Sahih Bukhari***



Ahmad Antar
Charlotte, North Carolina

**"Khilafat is the true reason for
our community's success."**

I grew up in Sidon, Lebanon prior to my arrival in the United States in 1999. Conventional wisdom suggests that growing up in a conflict-ridden area in the Middle East such as Lebanon would lend to a rather difficult childhood and adolescence. While I have experienced my share of routine Middle East rockets and foreign occupation, by the grace of Allah, my childhood was quite stable and satisfactory. My parents enrolled me in an Evangelical Christian school, and all things considered, I was very focused on my educational pursuits while growing up. I was also quite curious about both worldly and spiritual affairs, and it would be this curiosity and openness towards other ways of thinking that would eventually lead me to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Prior to joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, I was already a Sunni Muslim [Ahmadi Muslims are also Sunni as they follow the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad]. I practiced the basics of Islam but kept to myself about religion. I regularly fasted in Ramadhan (starting at about the age of 12 years), and I did not drink alcohol or eat pork. I also prayed daily. But as I said, my main focus was on education, and it would not be until college that I would think more deeply about the exact place of religion in my life. While growing up in Lebanon, my family – a typical Sunni Muslim family in Lebanon – was quite tolerant of religious differences, and we generally enjoyed very cordial relations with our neighbors, most of whom were Christian. When it was our Eid holiday, our Christian neighbors would come to visit us bearing gifts and food, and likewise, when it was our Christian neighbors' Easter holiday, our family would visit them with similar items.

There was a genuine degree of goodwill and mutual respect between our neighbors and us, and this was generally the case in Lebanon, despite what the media would lead you to believe today. Lebanon remains a religiously diverse society, with Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, Maronite Christians, and Druze being the major religious groups. In Lebanon, tolerance and pluralism are intrinsic in society and in government, as the Prime Minister must be a Sunni Muslim, the President must be a Christian, and the Speaker of the House must be a Shi'ite Muslim. Out of all the religious groups in Lebanon, Sunni Muslims are the most tolerant, a fact that unfortunately is not true of Sunni Muslim communities in other countries (like Pakistan).

I was very open towards the worldviews of others, and after arriving in the United States, I appreciated the emphasis in this country on both civil and human rights. Still, Lebanon will always remain an important part of my life. In 2000, the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon (to what is known as the "Green Line") was a very emotional experience for me to witness as all my family and indeed all Lebanese had considered it Israeli occupation. I hope and pray that even better days are in Lebanon's future, God willing.

When I was in college, I began actively studying other religions, and my curiosity was especially piqued when I came across the name "Ahmadiyya." I researched Ahmadiyya on the Internet, and I was taken aback by the numerous anti-Ahmadiyya hate websites. Nevertheless, I was undeterred, and I started to learn more about Ahmadiyya beliefs by going to the Community's official website, alislam.org, as well as its U.S. website, ahmadiyya.us.

There I learned there was a local chapter in North Carolina: the Research Triangle Chapter. So I got in touch with the then-President of the chapter, Wajeeh Bajwa, and scheduled a series of visits which would enable me to learn more about the community and its members. Everything that I witnessed seemed in accordance with what I knew to be Islamic protocol and tradition, including the offering of prayers, greetings towards one another, and general friendliness and hospitality from the brothers towards each other, as well as towards a guest like myself.

I kept on visiting the chapter, and became more and more comfortable with each visit. I also read the Promised Messiah's speech, published as a book titled *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, and the content of the speech was very meaningful to me. You could say, it "clicked" with me in a major way, such that I became firmly convinced of the truth of the Promised Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, as well as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Soon,

I learned about the Charlotte chapter, which was located in the city that I would move to and settle in upon the completion of an internship in Winston Salem, North Carolina. By the grace of Allah almighty, I took the pledge in the Charlotte mosque in 2005, and filled out the official initiation form in the house of the President of the Charlotte chapter, Nadeem Faizi, with whom I was fortunate to have established a special relationship focused on dialogue and learning about Ahmadiyya teachings.

By the grace of Allah, things have turned out well for me since that decision, as I have completed work on a masters degree, gotten a good job at an investment bank, and also gotten married to a resident of the Charlotte chapter (which has worked out very well, by the grace of Allah). Moreover, my parents have been generally supportive of my conversion. I mentioned that, as Sunni Muslims from Lebanon, my parents were quite tolerant already, but as an Ahmadi Muslim, I do not appear any different to them – they still see that I am an observant Muslim who prays and follows our religion's commandments, and as such, I remain in their good graces.

“I believe that every Muslim believes in the need for Khilafat, for spiritual guidance for all mankind from a single, authoritative source.”

I actively participate in community activities, by the grace of Allah. As soon as I joined the Charlotte chapter, I helped to build a library in the mosque that could hold all of the Community's books, pamphlets, etc. I also actively encouraged others to read this literature. I started a newsletter for the whole chapter, and was elected Publications Secretary, which I remain today. This sort of service, coupled with events like the annual convention, MKA retreats as well as the overall realization that I can do so much in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community at a local, regional, and national level, has kept me going strong within the ranks of the Community, by the grace of Allah.

I was also elected leader for the Charlotte chapter of MKA in 2006, which entailed its own steady set of responsibilities over the next two years. I had to be a constant, positive example to my fellow Khuddam, and be very engaging and encouraging to them at the same time (so as to convince them to be regular in their attendance). Indeed, remaining involved in the Community is the secret to staying in the Community after taking the pledge. The reason that some members leave, or at least remain inactive in the community after taking the

pledge, is that we do not collectively engage them in the community's activities. It does require a personal commitment on the individual's part, but it also requires the community's best efforts at inclusion and engagement. Spreading the message is, and will always be, an ongoing effort.

I believe that every Muslim believes in the need for Khilafat, for spiritual guidance for all of mankind from a single, authoritative source. The problem with other Muslims is that they are unaware of what exactly to look for in respect to Khilafat. They need guidance from our community as to how to identify the true Khalifa, and accept him. Khilafat is the true reason for our community's success – uniting under the 'banner' of khilafat is what has brought our community unity, prosperity, and God's blessings. Uniting under the banner of Khilafat is the reason for the shared feeling of brotherhood within MKA, a feeling and camaraderie that does not exist to a desirable extent outside of our Community.

There is so much division and antagonism between other Muslim sects today that it is hard not to pin its cause on the lack of a unifying force like Khilafat. It was our Fourth Khalifa, Mirza Tahir Ahmad, who wrote in his important book, *Murder in the Name of Allah*, that killing civilians in the name of religion is wrong, and this is a message that, unfortunately, far too many Muslims outside of our Community have not properly grasped. The Fourth Khalifa's question & answer sessions have been important not just in my own life, but in the Charlotte chapter's efforts to spread our message, as they have been included in our MKA newsletter (entitled "Garden of Peace"), and sent to prisons as well.

I was very fortunate, by the grace of Allah, to meet our present Khalifa, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, during his first visit to the United States in 2008, on the occasion of the 60th Annual Convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It was a simple meeting, and I was able to introduce myself to him. Yet it was a spiritually uplifting and emotional experience for me.

Since November 2007, I have served as a regional MKA leader, and I am also in charge of spiritual and moral training. While our community's local, regional, and national MKA activities, my job, and my family keep me quite busy, I still find time to do things that I have always enjoyed – reading, playing tennis, camping, and fixing things. I feel truly blessed by the grace of Allah.



Mumin Salaam Ali
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**“Life improved in many ways
after accepting Islam.”**

I was born in 1977, and my parents named me William Lee Thomas III. I grew up in a working class family. My father, William Thomas Jr., worked in a foundry and my mother, Lynn Taylor, worked as a nurse's aide and a waitress. I have two sisters, Athena Thomas and Whitney Taylor, and one half brother. When I was five years old my parents divorced, which led me to believe I was never going to see my father again, but being the naïve child I was, that was not the case. My mother and father worked out visitation rights, so my sister and I got to visit our father on the weekends.

My mom remarried and that's when I started going to church. As a kid growing up I had no understanding as to why one goes to church – I just had to go because my mom said so. I started to understand more about it as I got into my teenage years. The most common stories I heard were about Jesus and his disciples, or Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. And there was a lot of singing, which I had trouble doing because I didn't like singing – it even got me in trouble a few times with my stepfather but I didn't care.

Church didn't create a desire in me to be closer to God. There was nothing exciting about going to church. It was more like routine thing to do – Wednesday night class and Sunday school and church. If I asked a question about God, they would give their answer to the best of their ability, and if they could not answer it they would say, “You shouldn't question God or His book.”

Then there was the lack of brotherhood amongst my peers. I did not have many friends in church, aside from my cousins, so as I became a teenager, I slowly pulled away from church.

I did not become interested in Islam until high school. After I watched the movie “Malcolm X,” I knew I wanted to become a Muslim. That movie blew me away. To watch his life transformed into a dynamic person was fascinating. I began to research the religion. At the time, I was in a program that was gearing high school students for college called, Upward Bound. I gained a lot of friends from that program – some that I am still friends with to this day. One of my best friends was a Sunni Muslim. He would tell a little something about Islam, but I was not gaining anything from it, because he was not a practicing Muslim himself.

Upward Bound staff assigned us Tutor Counselors, or “TC,” as we students liked to call them. Their job was to provide us with tutors to help with homework, and to motivate us to do well in school, work hard and graduate. I wasn’t the best of students but I tried my best. My TC, Muhammin Malik, happened to be an Ahmadi Muslim. He was more than a T.C. to me – he was a good friend. I feel Allah used him as an instrument to help me, as along the way, he introduced me to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. He was a very influential person in my life. When I told him I wanted to check out the Nation of Islam he said “Go ahead and do your research but always keep an open mind and check out the Ahmadi Muslims as well,” so I did.

My first encounter with the Nation of Islam was on a Sunday afternoon. I sat down and listened to what they had to say and I wasn’t impressed. It was more of a feel good message, but not a spiritual message. Their message was about “what the white man was doing to the black man,” and “how the white man was pushing drugs and alcohol into the black community.” I knew there was injustice in America, but in my heart I did not feel hateful towards whites. I did not want to associate with an organization that spread hatred towards another race. After the speech, visitors like me, who were trying to find some meaning in their life, were asked to find some money in their pockets, starting with a thousand dollars down to pocket change. I got up and left, feeling disappointed.

I decided to check out the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. So next Friday comes and I go up to the mosque. After Friday prayers I go inside, check out the place, I look around and all I see is a lot of Pakistani brothers conversating with one another. Once again I became discouraged because I didn’t see any many African-American brothers in the mosque. So I left and went home feeling disappointed, again. When I got home I told myself, “I am not going to let color defeat my decision so I’ll give it another try, because I trust and respect my friend Muhammin.”

Before returning to the mosque, I happen to catch a show on a local cable station called, "Islam Live," with these two brothers, Muhammad Sabir and Rashid Ahmad. What they were talking about was total completely different from what the Nation was saying. They talked about how Jesus did not die on the cross but survived the crucifixion. It sparked my interest in wanting to learn more about the Ahmadiyya Community.

After a couple of weeks I go to the mosque, and after Friday service the first person I see is Brother Sabir. I said to him, "I want to be a Muslim and I watched your show on TV." I know he was pleased to hear that, considering all the hecklers that call the show. From there he introduced me to Brother Rashid Ahmad and we talked for a while. After that I started classes with him at least two or three times a week. He taught me the basics of Islam, like the five pillars, six articles of faith, the life of Prophet Muhammad and the prayers. Something inside me felt this was what I was looking for. Allah sent me to the right place after all. In June 1996, after studying with Brother Rashid, I signed the pledge, alhamdulillah.

Life improved in many ways after accepting Islam. In 1997, I got married, which is an interesting story. My friend and I were looking at his yearbook one day and when we got to my future wife's picture, I asked who she was and my friend told me that she was a Muslim too. So I told him to "hook me up." I met her and her family and came to find out they were all Ahmadi Muslims.

When I think about it now, I feel that Allah was always looking out for me and I am everso grateful to him. So after the conversion and marriage I found myself slowly but gradually growing into the Community. It took me a while to get the hang of it, but I was determined to study more and ask more questions about Ahmadiyya teachings.

Two events in my life gave me more motivation and dedication than anything else: one is related to my late father-in-law, and the other is related to our beloved Fourth Khalifa, the late Mirza Tahir Ahmad, may Allah be pleased with their souls. One Friday, my father-in-law, Yusef Ali, asked whether his sons and I were going to prayer service. I replied no, because I did not feel like going. His response was, "You may not feel like going but your soul will feel better." That statement had a weird effect on me, so I asked him to explain it, which he did. From then on, I started going to Friday service at least twice a month if not every Friday, because I understood its very important for us Muslims to attend Friday service. Allah says in the Qur'an, "Ye who believe, when the call is made for prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave off all business. That is best for you if you only knew." This was something I strive to do and take serious to this day.

The second such event took place when our beloved Fourth Khalifa passed away. When I first heard about it I was shocked, just like everyone else. But the calm and collected way Ahmadi Muslims handled his death showed me that I was part of something special. I remember sitting at the mosque with the brothers, watching the funeral of the Fourth Khalifa and the election of the next Khalifa on MTA. Aside from being a learning experience, it was very emotional for me, because I went back to work that day. If I thought at all about Hadhur I would have to step outside, look up at the sky, which on that day was clear and beautiful, and I would start to cry – I couldn't help it. So I knew that the Community I was in was special.

I am very grateful to Allah because I am still an Ahmadi Muslim, I am still married and we have three beautiful kids: Omar Ali who is 10, Yasmin Ali, 5, and Laila Ali, 2. My marriage has kept me in check, out of trouble, and in the mosque for my Khuddam duties. I serve as the Secretary of Finance, which is challenging, but I am determined to make better of it, InshaAllah. My allegiance to MKA has helped me become a better person, have stronger brotherhood and good friends I can talk to and hang out with all the time. What has kept me in the Community is the brotherhood, my belief in the Promised Messiah, Khilafat, and prayers. I hope and pray that my story reaches somebody and inspires them to look for that same direction in life that I was looking for, InshaAllah.



Mumin Ali spending time in the kitchen with his three children: Laila, Yasmin, and Omar.



Syed Shahzad Hussain
Baltimore, Maryland

**"I was tortured by 'Muslims' but
I refused to recant."**

I was born in Kashmir but spent most of my childhood and early adulthood in Lahore, Pakistan. I was raised in a balanced religious environment, with loving parents, as well as two brothers and one sister. My ancestral lineage has produced many saintly people, many of whom have been laid to rest in tombs that survive to this day.

I have fond memories of my childhood in Pakistan. I was a great cricket player, playing both batsmen and bowler positions. Our team was very good and we would often compete in Lahore's competitive leagues. I was also very involved in martial arts, ultimately earning a black belt in Shoto Kaan. Shoto Kaan combines striking aspects of Karate with wrestling and grappling techniques particular to Judo. In Shoto Kaan, as with cricket, I excelled and won many local competitions that schools or clubs were holding.

Regarding academics, I spent my time attending three different grade schools, that last of which was National Finishing School in Gulburg. I went on to earn a Bachelor's in Commerce at the Haley College of Commerce, a division of Punjab University.

While I was attending college in 1991, a friend of mine named Ghulam Hussain came to me and suggested I meet an Ahmadi Muslim friend of his. Ghulam felt Ahmadiyya views were very odd and thought I would get a good laugh out of hearing what they believed. I was actually excited because I had never spoken to an Ahmadi Muslim and had only heard the usual anti-Ahmadiyya propaganda that one hears in Pakistan.

I went to the house of a man named Rashid Rabbani in Lahore. Rashid had a pleasing disposition and had his own business in Cant, providing surgical instruments to hospitals. I chatted with Rashid for about an hour and asked him a lot of basic questions: Why do Muslims consider Ahmadi Muslims to be “non-Muslim”; what is the Ahmadiyya view of the advent of the Imam Mahdi (guided leader) and Promised Messiah; and what is the Ahmadiyya view of the “Seal of Prophethood.”

The explanations Rashid gave me were intriguing, so before leaving I asked for some references. He gave me some pamphlets providing Qur’anic verses which I took and went home to review. A week went later, I went back to Rashid’s house and told him that the references he had given me were indeed correct and I was interested in learning more about Ahmadiyya teachings. We talked some more and Rashid gave me the famous treatise of the Second Khalifa, *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat*. Over the course of a year, I would read a great deal of Ahmadiyya literature, including, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam and Noah's Ark*.

My parents learned of my interest in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community two to three months after I had begun my research. They were not opposed to me studying Ahmadiyya teachings but warned me to do so in secret so that no one in the family would find out and either worry for me or speak ill of me. My siblings held the same view. Still, I would often go to the local mullahs and ask them to rebut various Ahmadiyya doctrines. I eventually figured out that they had no answers and simply dismissed Ahmadi Muslims as being liars, saying that everyone should just avoid talking to them. I even spoke with my friend Ghulam (who had introduced me to Rashid Rabbani), but even he said Ahmadi Muslims say one thing and practice another. I also had discussions with Islam Jamaat-e-Tuleba, the student wing of Jama’at Islami, a hardline Muslim political party, at Punjab University. As with the mullahs, the students had nothing to offer bout foul language and empty arguments.

Throughout this period of approximately one year, I secretly attended Friday service at the Ahmadiyya mosque, Darul Zikr. While the mullahs would bicker over absolutely trivial matters or backbite neighboring mullahs during their sermons, I was amazed to see how enlightened and refined Ahmadi Muslims were, especially their khalifa. It was as if I was in a completely different atmosphere when I was around Ahmadi Muslims.

During this period, Rashid introduced me to another Ahmadi Muslim, Shafiq Ahmad, who lived nearby. I began going to his house for evening prayers. Other Ahmadi Muslims would also come by and we would hold Qur’anic study

classes, which gave me the opportunity to ask any question I liked. I enjoyed these outings a lot as it was a very welcoming and loving atmosphere.

I was praying intensely throughout this period for guidance. I was satisfied with the logical force of Ahmadiyya arguments, but I wanted my heart to be at rest. One night I had a dream that on the one side of the road stood a pack of jackals, barking, and on the other side was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. His face was radiant and magnetic. He was lovingly calling me to him, saying that if I came to him I would be safe from the jackals. After experiencing this dream, I went to Darul Zikr Mosque and took the pledge, in 1993.

My friends remained neutral about my decision to accept the Messiah. However, at Punjab University – where I had begun to spread the message of Islam Ahmadiyya – some students became agitated and filed a complaint with the police. One day the police came to my home and took me to the police station where I remained incarcerated for ten days. During this period I was subject to various forms of torture: abusive language, coercive attempts to make me leave the Ahmadiyya Community, even physical beatings.

Finally my parents were able to secure my release on the guarantee that I would not attempt to spread the message of Ahmadiyya to anyone. Naturally, they were very worried and upset with me and ordered that I remain at home. For one month I could not leave the house, even to go to college. Eventually I ran away from home.

In those days, it was possible to secure passage to South Africa without a visa. So I called my parents and informed them that I was leaving for South Africa. For some time I stayed in Johannesburg where there was no local chapter of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I learned there was a chapter in Capetown and began visiting often. In 1995 I had the good fortune to move to London, England. While in London, I would religiously attend the Fourth Khalifa's Question and Answer sessions and bring my non-Ahmadi Muslim relatives and friends. In either '98 or '99, I was blessed serve on Hadhur's security detail while during his trip to Holland.

I would later travel across Europe, New Zealand and South Africa. In December of 2000, I moved to America, settling in Maryland. In America, too, I had the blessed opportunity to serve Khilafat. When our present Khalifa visited America in 2008, I was charged with taking care of his shoes, when he took them off for prayers.

I often wonder why Allah blessed me with being able to recognize the Imam of the Age. I feel truly blessed as I have a steady job and a loving family, and I have been able to serve as the leader of the Baltimore MKA chapter for

the last four years, and have helped both my brothers to accept the teachings of Islam Ahmadiyya. I have made great friends with many brothers through MKA. I truly feel MKA's national leaders are role models and have had a profound impact on my life.

I pray we remain on the right path, and my parents and sister also join us, as they have yet to join the Community but recognize its truth.



Syed Shahzad Hussain accepting an award for "Best Midsize Youth Chapter" from His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, during the 2008 Annual Convention of the USA Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.



Edin Bajrektarevic
Ankeny, Iowa

“Suddenly, the idea crept into my mind that I should learn about Islam; that moment was a turning point for me.”

I was born in 1978 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I grew up in a Muslim family, but we did not practice religion at all. We only celebrated Eid festivals and that was it. Some of my relatives, like my grandmother, practiced Islam, but it did not have much influence on us. We had some contact with Communist ideology – with respect to this ideology, there isn't really comprehensive religious belief per se, but rather belief in some higher “power.” My father for a time believed in this, but it was never a major part of our collective lives. There was definitely room for religion generally, and Islam more specifically, to become a bigger part of our lives.

During the early 1990s, the Bosnian-Serbian War had a major impact on my family and me. It was brutal – materially, we lost everything! Our furniture, personal belongings, and even the country's electrical infrastructure were completely destroyed as a result of the conflict. When the war started, I was about 14 years old, and my family and I lived in Serbian-controlled territory. In 1995, we moved from that area as a part of a planned “swap” of 150 Muslims for three or four Serbs. At the beginning of our stay in Bosnian-controlled territory we moved around a lot. Finally, in 1996, we moved to Sarajevo (the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina), and stayed there for about five years. Around this time I first heard about Humanity First (an international humanitarian relief organization launched by the Fourth Khalifa), which had been doing some relief work in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Once, while walking in Sarajevo, a man stopped me and asked me: “Do you know anything about God?” I replied: “I don't believe in God.” He said: “We

need someone just like that." I wondered why he needed me when I did not believe in God or religion. I first learned of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 1997. The community had a chapter in a city called Gracanica (established in 1996). It's funny – Gracanica was where I lived in the early part of 1996, but I didn't know about the Community then. When we moved to Sarajevo in late 1996, the Community did the same, and it was there that I would come to know more about Islam Ahmadiyya.

Throughout my childhood I was a good student and enjoyed sports. I even planned to be a professional soccer player and an electrical engineer, but suddenly in the summer of 1997, it hit me! I don't know what happened to me! After I finished high school, my life started changing for the worse. I lost interest in everything. This was also after the war. Our problems seemed so complicated, and I could not see a way out. I became very nervous, I was arguing with my brother and parents all the time, and I remained disinterested in doing anything or going anywhere. I started feeling that my living space was getting smaller and smaller, and I started losing patience, and did not know what to do with myself. I asked myself: "What will happen with me after some years? If I don't know what to do with my life at the age of 19, what will I do when I get older?"

Suddenly, the idea crept into my mind that I should learn about Islam. Today, I believe that that moment was a major turning point for me. I started to learn how to offer prayers and after about six months, I completely learned the prayers, and began to visit a local Sunni mosque in Sarajevo. Initially, my parents expressed their concern that my brother and I had become "too strict" with ourselves, and that we were spending "too much time" going to the mosque, as compared to the coffee shop we had previously frequented. I told my parents not to worry about us and that we would take care of ourselves. Along with this spiritual change in me came some much-needed control over my life. I became more focused, and studied not only Islam, but the history of other religions as well. My friends also started to take notice of the change in my disposition.

In Sarajevo, for the first time, we visited the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, where we met Imam Wasim Ahmad. By the grace of Allah, Imam Wasim Ahmad had previously done missionary work in Bosnia, and he shared the local mission house with a man named Shahid, who my brother was working for at the time. Imam Wasim served us tea and cookies, talked to us about Islam, and gave us food to take home. Thus, we concluded our first visit with the Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The next day, I talked with a friend of mine (who was a very active Sunni Muslim), and I said to him that I had met some Muslims, and that I wanted to change my life for the better and practice Islam. I told my friend that he should come with me to meet with them. The very moment I told him they are Ahmadi Muslims, my friend said, "Don't go over there, they are not good." I asked, "Why not, they did not say anything bad." I narrated to him that Imam Wasim Ahmad had explained to me that the reason why Muslims worldwide are in such a lamentable state today is because they are divided, and unfortunately, because most still believe that Jesus is "alive in the sky." But he did not change his mind, and that is how we finished our dialogue.

My brother continued to visit the Community and soon after, he became an Ahmadi Muslim, but even then, I did not pay too much attention to his decision. I continued to visit the Sunni mosque daily. Fortunately for me, from 1992-1997, Germany had taken in many Bosnian refugees (roughly 500,000). You see, the German chapter of the Ahmadiyya Community was producing Q&A sessions with the Fourth Khalifa that were geared specifically towards the Bosnian refugee community in Germany. The Community distributed these videotaped Q&A sessions, and I was able to watch many of them, and learn about Ahmadiyya teachings. I was also reading some books now, doing some research, and on Eid in 1998, I signed the initiation form! I remember at that moment I said to Imam Wasim Ahmad: "There is a big struggle in front of us."

Since that moment, my life has changed completely! Imam Wasim Ahmad immediately included my brother and me in spreading the message of Islam Ahmadiyya. I did not have a lot of knowledge at the time, but I was trying my best to convey the message of the Promised Messiah to others. I quickly realized how much I did not know, and how much I had to learn in order to be successful in my efforts to share our message. Many people we met were afraid to even listen to us. They were afraid to visit the Community because they thought that they would somehow lose their faith. On the account of inaccurate "stories" that they heard from others, and without doing any research on their own, they rejected the Promised Messiah. They did not even want to take any publications from us! So we asked them how could you prejudge a person without listening to their message? Is that the way of a "true believer"? We continued this kind of discussion with other Bosnians, but unfortunately, few joined the Community.

In 1999, I joined the Army, and I believe that that was the biggest test of my faith. I was the lone Ahmadi Muslim amongst the 3,000 to 4,000 people on the Army base. I did not want to pray behind Muslims who rejected the Promised

Messiah, and thus, I was always offering my prayers after the others. After praying, I would sit with the other guys and talk about Islam without telling them that I was an Ahmadi Muslim. From my experience, if you tell others you are an Ahmadi Muslim right away, they will not want to listen to you, so I decided that I will let them get to know me, and we will talk, and InshaAllah, Allah will show me the right moment to tell them who I am.

That moment came after we discussed the death of Jesus. I told them that Jesus is not “alive in the sky,” but that he died, and that the Promised Messiah has come. It was then that they realized that I am an Ahmadi Muslim, and that was why I was not offering prayers with them. I said to them firmly, “I don’t want to offer prayers behind an Imam who has not accepted the ‘Imam from God!’” They would say to me, “You are wrong, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a liar,” and “He was an ‘English agent’ who came to destroy Islam and to divide Muslims.” I will admit that sometimes I felt ashamed, and I prayed to Allah a lot, that may Allah keep me on the right path, and may Allah never let me lose faith. By the grace of Allah, after more than 10 years, I feel very happy because in those difficult moments, I did not give up on the truth.

When we came to the United States in 2004, I wanted to live close to the Community. My brother and I considered living in the Washington, D.C. area, an attractive place on the account of Baitur Rahman Mosque. After much prayer, around the time of Ramadhan in 2004, my brother and I moved to a suburb of Des Moines, Iowa, named Ankeny. We decided to rent an apartment reserved just for offering prayers during Ramadhan, and by the grace of Allah, the Community helped us pay the rent. Thus far, this mission house has produced nine Ahmadi Muslims, including my parents. The mission house has yet to be named, but is currently considered an extended part of the Chicago West chapter. On a professional level, by the grace of Allah, I became a fully licensed journeyman electrician in early 2009.

Another blessing of Allah came in May 2008 during the Fifth Khalifa’s Centenary Address from Great Britain, marking 100 years of the Ahmadiyya Khilafat. By the grace of Allah, I got to meet the Khalifa. The one thing that really struck me during my personal visit with His Holiness was that he was smiling a lot. I had previously thought that he was more serious as compared to our previous Khalifa. But His Holiness was very friendly during our meeting, and even joked that my brother, Edwin, looked like a wrestler! This was a very moving experience for me, as I had not had the opportunity to meet the Fourth Khalifa. I remember thinking to myself that I should offer as many prayers as possible with His Holiness while in Great Britain. May Allah accept them all.



Omar Latif
Racine, Wisconsin

"I thought all Muslims subscribed to the notion that Muhammad was the last prophet of God - period."

I was born in 1970 in Racine, Wisconsin. My family was comprised of my mother, father and two younger brothers. My family was close knit and our upbringing was generally good and decent. My parents actively sought out ways and means to insulate us from outside negative influences by creating an enjoyable home environment for my siblings and me. In 1989, after a long struggle with cancer, my father passed away. I believe his passing served as a catalyst for my subsequent search for a greater understanding of spirituality and God.

I was raised in Baptist Christianity and in my younger years we would attend church Sunday services fairly regularly. My brothers and I were enrolled in the children's Sunday school classes and also belonged to the church choir. When we became teenagers, our parents let my brothers and me decide whether to attend church. Our participation began to lessen up until we stopped attending church altogether.

I would categorize my faith back then as cultural more than anything real. Like most Americans, I celebrated holidays like Christmas, but my overall mindset was unwittingly not in the direction of God. I believed in God, but lacked the guidance and understanding as to what it really meant to have a relationship with God.

After my high school graduation in 1988, I enrolled in a state university. At the end of my freshman year my father passed away from cancer and this left a void in my life. It was at this point that I really began to more so reflect on life, its meaning, and how it related to my understanding of God. Now at this point

there was no clear path to follow, however these thoughts were now firmly in the forefront of my mind on a relatively consistent basis, whereas before they were not.

I can recall that back at that time while having this need to search out a greater meaning to life, I never had the slightest thought to look back in the direction of Christianity in the hopes of fulfilling this need. I did not hold any malice towards the church, however it simply was not a viable option or even a consideration for me at that point in my life.

In an effort to fill this void I began examining various life philosophies and reading different books in that regard. Ironically, the first philosophy or worldview that I endeavored towards was not religious at all, but again cultural, and this was pseudo black nationalism, or pan-Africanism.

This worldview espoused that African-Americans or people of African descent should put aside all religious, political, and socio-economic differences and come together simply based on their shared cultural identity and experience. As a minority on a predominantly white college campus, this appealed to me. I therefore inclined towards pan-Africanism and read many books on it. It was through this ongoing process that I came across the late Malcolm X. I began reading about him and the Nation of Islam, which introduced me to the term “Islam” – albeit on a superficial level.

Yet despite the number of books I read, these various philosophies – from the ancient Egyptian principles of Ma’at to the pseudo-Islamic pro-black rhetoric of the Nation of Islam – did not fill the void in my life. While these approaches afforded me a momentary feel-good sensation, they lacked true substance, causing me to either lose interest or simply outgrow them altogether.

In 1992, I began looking more towards Islam and seeking out literature that appealed to me. While I didn’t understand the differences between Sunni, Shi'a, Ahmadiyya and so on, I just wanted to learn what Islam had to offer.

It was during this time that I came across the book entitled *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in my school library. This is when I first inclined towards the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, albeit on a more subconscious level. In short, of all the diverse books I was reading at the time I was a “seeker,” it was only *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* that stood above and beyond all the others. I had never came across a book that spoke directly to one’s heart in such a powerful but yet understandable manner. I checked this book out of the library that day and re-checked it out subsequently several times to read it over again.

Around this same time that I met Waleed Ahmad, an Ahmadi Muslim brother at my university, who happened to be in one of my classes. He was an African-American Ahmadi Muslim who himself had converted to Islam Ahmadiyya a few years earlier. He wore a kufi and kept a beard and this is how I initially identified him as a Muslim – I knew that much!

At first I just observed him and took notice of his intriguing observations during class discussions. It was to the point that even after class had ended, classmates would surround him, captivated by his arguments and positions on a topic – even if they disagreed with him. After witnessing this on a few occasions, I resolved to ask him about his religious affiliation. I asked him if he was a Muslim and he replied in the affirmative. We then had a general discussion about Islam and our own religious backgrounds. We developed a friendship from that point on that entailed many discussions on religion and social issues.

It was through such dialogue I learned that the essence of his arguments in class were derived from Ahmadiyya literature. I was intrigued for I had never heard such powerful arguments set forth by a student (or professor) in any of my classes. Although I was unconscious of it at the time, it was his application of Islam Ahmadiyya to our general discussions that helped foster our friendship.

In 1993, I began to study the religion of Islam more intently and was now seriously considering becoming a Muslim. Yet despite my relationship with my Ahmadi Muslim friend, I still did not understand the importance of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and what it meant in the context of Islam. Indeed for me, a Muslim was a Muslim.

“I have experienced a positive change in my life since converting to Islam.”

Towards the end of year, my friend and I were in a general religious discussion when he made a point from *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* without reference to the book or author. Mind you that at that point we had never discussed Ahmadiyya beliefs or any of the issues that surrounded it. I immediately recognized that the point he was making came from *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* (which I just happened to have in my backpack at the time) so I followed up his point with further reference to the passage of the book he was alluding to in an effort to make a point.

Upon hearing me make specific reference to the book and passage, he immediately asked me how I knew about it. I then pulled the book out of my backpack, saying that I had checked it out of the school's library. He then asked me what I knew about Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, to which I replied that I knew nothing more aside from the book. It was from that point on that our discussions turned towards Islam Ahmadiyya, with my friend speaking more actively and directly to the issue.

Not long after this the whole issue came to a head, when my friend asserted that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the Promised Messiah, a prophet of God, and even produced a photo of him. Up until this point, I thought all Muslims subscribed to the notion that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet of God – period. I didn't see the need for another "prophet" after the Holy Prophet, and in a word, I found the idea to be ridiculous. After this exchange I began to rethink my relationship with him. I had been successful in sidestepping the Nation of Islam but now here was another potential threat to my spiritual wellbeing, to which I didn't want to be needlessly subjected. The only factor that maintained our relationship was the general friendship we had fostered over the past two years from being in the same classes and having shared interests.

Not until a half year later would I agree to even read some Ahmadiyya literature he had been suggesting. He gave me a copy of the book *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat* and asked me to read it, and pray to God to guide me on the right path. I took this advice to heart and soon thereafter, in June of 1994, I took the pledge and entered the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, alhamdulillah. *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat* resolved all my concerns regarding a prophet coming after Prophet Muhammad as well. The verses of the Qur'an, Hadith, the need of the time and all the signs put together left me confident that the Ahmadiyya position was indeed correct.

I have experienced a positive change in my life since converting to Islam. It was this and this alone that gave greater definition and purpose to my life, in that it afforded me a genuine relationship with the One God and a united community under one leader. In 1998, I was blessed to get married, and my wife and I are happily married with one daughter.

This in a nutshell is what I had previously been searching for, on both a conscious and subconscious level; i.e., a relationship with God and true brotherhood, for one cannot truly exist unless the other exists. This is the reality that I was fortunate enough to realize, and begin to partake in, to strengthen ties between my Creator and myself, and with my brothers.

Since then I have been a member of the Zion chapter and serve in various capacities. I have been actively involved in MKA since I converted as well. Activities within MKA not only fostered brotherhood with other khuddam, but it also served as a safeguard against evil. When people come together for any purpose it forges a greater commonality and understanding amongst them, and this is only compounded when it is in the service of God, for it is more self effacing.

This is an ongoing journey with no end. It is predicated upon the degree to which I incline towards God; that is, you get out of it what you put into it. No intercessor is needed for the decision rests in your hands.

My message to all those who may be seeking some form of guidance in which to structure their life around is to come with an open heart and mind and experience Islam Ahmadiyya. The traditions of Islam teach that if a man takes one step towards God, He takes ten steps towards him. Ameen.

“America is a mixture of nationalities, languages, races and colors. It is a land of freedom, but freedom is being misused in some cases. The Americans, approached rightly and talked to reasonably, are ready to accept the truth.”

***- Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq
The Moslem Sunrise, Inaugural Issue***



Sazzad Khandakar
Monroe Township, New Jersey

**“... it was apparent that people who preached Islam
were not practicing the same.”**

I was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh. My family comes from the district of Jamalpur, which was named after one of my own ancestors who migrated from the Middle East back in the 1700s to preach Islam in the land of Bengal. Over many generations, my ancestors served as teachers in the Madrasa, homeopathy doctors and local Imams. However, after British rule ended, many of them went into more secular professions. My father and his brothers all received secular educations and eventually migrated to the capital.

I lived in Bangladesh for eighteen years and grew up in a traditional Sunni Muslim environment. However, in modern times, the practice of true Islam became a thing of the past. Like most Muslims in Bangladesh, we practiced Islam as a part of our culture. Islam was taught in our primary and high schools as a required discipline; however, there was no emphasis on spirituality. I do not recall seeing a single reference to the coming of the Messiah in any of the tests we were required to study. All in all, people in general never talked about the messiah or the coming of a savior. During those eighteen years, I vaguely recall just one instance where my parents even mentioned ‘Qadiani’. And the advice my parents gave me then was to stay away from them because they are not Muslims. But God definitely had different plans for me!

I migrated to the States in the late 1980s for higher education. I have to say that I was still not very religious, in the traditional sense. I focused primarily on my education and getting my feet on the ground to support my family. After finishing college, I got married to a Bengali Muslim. As with most people from Bangladesh, we were very proud of our culture and heritage. We spent a lot time

attending and participating in cultural activities. The people who surrounded us at that time were of a similar background. While they were fun company, we began to see how empty their lives were. I think this was a warning sign for me.

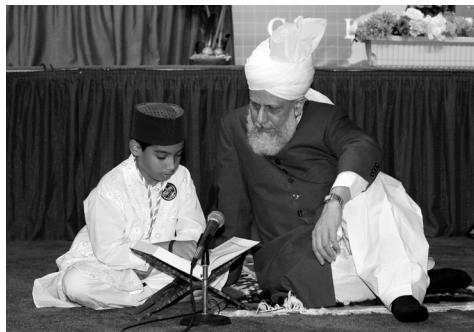
Growing up in a place like Bangladesh, it was apparent that people who preached Islam were not practicing the same. There was a complete lack of spirituality and honesty. There was not a single religious figure that could be named as a role model or did not have a scandal attributed to him. I generally believed that there was a God, but I wasn't sure these Imams or the organized religion they represented was going to bring me close to Him. And over time, we as a people became very complacent with this belief.

In the early 1990s I entered the job market, but things were rough. I was having problems in my personal life as well. We were planning to have children and felt the need to inculcate true and proper Islamic values in our lives, for our children. We were now seeking. During this time, one of our family members was introduced to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. They gave us some reading material as well, but being as skeptical as we were, after a quick glance, it ended up somewhere in a bookshelf.

A few years went by. In the meantime, we saw significant change in our relative's life. That change prompted me to investigate Ahmadiyya beliefs once more. My curiosity was reignited when I heard the word 'Qadiani' again. I started researching on this on my own. Despite the Internet being a new technology at the time, I stumbled upon a lot of pro- and anti-Ahmadiyya material. I read as much as I could on both aspects. It was just mind-boggling for me. Many excerpts from the Promised Messiah's *Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya* were crucial for me. The story of Alexander Dowie in America also intrigued me.

As I was doing my research, I also started praying more regularly. I picked up a few more books written by Promised Messiah – one being *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. After I read these books, it became clear in my mind that only a person with Divine connection could write with such authority. My wife was also studying Ahmadiyya beliefs and she received a compelling dream, after which she was convinced of the truth of the Messiah and immediately joined the fold. My only remaining confusion centered on the generally held view that Prophet Muhammad was the "last" prophet. However, after reading the book *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat* by the Second Khalifa, I was fully convinced and joined the fold in the spring of 1997. I still recall submitting my initiation form to Imam Daud Haneef in Queens, New York.

Ibshar Siraj Khandakar, son of Sazzad, during an Ameen ceremony with His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, at the 2008 Annual Convention of the USA Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.



Joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community helped me put many aspects of my life in order. Striving for the constant support and mercy of God Almighty is one of them. My wife and I decided to give God priority in our lives. Slowly, but surely, we left those circles which were distracting us from God. We also discovered true friends who admired our belief during this transition. We consciously became humbled by the positive changes that followed in our lives.

The sense of brotherhood, unity and belonging that I received by joining the Community was phenomenal. Needless to say, the members of the New York chapter very quickly became my family. One of my very first impressions of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was that people were making an honest effort to practice what they preached – in stark contrast to what I have seen with other religious groups.

By the grace of God, our desire to inculcate Islamic values in our lives for the sake of our children came true. In 1997, and again in 2000, I had the opportunity to meet the Fourth Khalifa. Meeting him only strengthened my faith in the Messiah and his Khulafa. Since accepting the Promised Messiah, we have been blessed with three children. By the grace of God, all of them are a part of the “New Devotions Initiative,” which dedicates children to the service of God and affords them a special upbringing. And it was the Fourth Khalifa who established this initiative. Our family also met our present Khalifa in 2008. My children completed their “Ameen ceremony,” upon finishing the first reading of the Qur'an, at the hands of His Holiness.

In conclusion, I admit I feel like a pioneer on a radical journey. It is a constant and fruitful and sometimes defensive struggle to improve our spiritual condition. Being Ahmadi Muslim we face a lot of scrutiny from non-Ahmadi family and friends. But we embrace it as a necessary struggle.

"I am the light in the darkness of this age. He who follows me, will be saved from the pits and ditches dug by the Devil to entice those straying in the dark. He has sent me so that I should lead the world, gently and in peace, to the One True God, and re-establish the moral excellences of Islam. And I have been given heavenly signs to satisfy those who seek the truth."

- Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
The Promised Messiah



Camil Cerimovic
Syracuse, New York

“...he told me that Ahmadi Muslims have reestablished the system of Khilafat and intend to reunite the Muslim Ummah.”

My story begins in early childhood. I was born and raised in a village called Sebiocina in District of Vlasenica, which is in the eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All 500 residents of my village are all Hanafi Muslims. We had a masjid in the center of the village where all the children of the village received religious education. My parents started sending me to the mosque when I was about six years old. While going to the mosque I learned the basic teachings of Islam, which included how to offer my five daily prayers, memorization of at least ten suras, or chapters, from the Holy Qur'an, the history of Islam, and most importantly, the need for religion. At age 10, I began attending Friday prayers at a mosque in Nova Kasaba, which was 7.5 kilometers away from my village. I used to go to an elementary school that was also in Nova Kasaba. All the children from my village walked 15 kilometers daily to school. On Fridays I used to get out of school to offer Friday prayers.

Village life was good and I have a lot of nice memories, which I will never forget. But then, when I was just 12 years old, war broke out in Bosnia. This part of my life was very traumatic for me, but I cannot continue my story without telling you about this horrible experience. In April of 1992, under attack from Serbian forces, all the people of my village fled their homes to the neighboring Muslim village. Since then, I have never once gone back to my village. That same year, the Serbs burned my village to the ground, and now, there is nothing to return to.

Being refugees in the neighboring village, very quickly we started experiencing shortages of food and clothing, hygiene problems, and

homelessness. The electricity was cut immediately and telephone communication lines were also cut – so basically we lived in the dark from 1992 to 1996! This was not the worst problem we had. The Serbs were attacking us on a daily basis. The terrifying sounds of the grenades and bombshells are memories that will probably never be erased from my brain. There were casualties every day and most of them were women and children. They were destroying our mosques and even killing our livestock.

We stayed in that village for about nine months, after which Serb forces occupied it. We then moved to another city called Srebrenica—site of the bloodiest massacre in the war—in 1993. We were moving from place to place every few months. The last place we lived before I came to the United States was a suburb of the Bosnian capitol, Sarajevo. This short story cannot tell you everything about the horrors of the war, but it can at least tell you a portion. When you are caught in a war, you feel helpless, hopeless and finally you come to realize that there is no help from anybody, except Allah.

In fact, many people turned to faith in Bosnia during the course of the war. Since we were moving a lot during the war, whenever we moved to a new place, the first thing I did was to find the location of the mosque so I can attend Friday prayers. The conditions in wartime were such that for many Muslims it looked like it was the end of the world. The Imams during Friday prayers were focusing their sermons on latter days prophecies of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

In 1994, an older Imam, who was leading the prayer in a place called Banovici, was giving most of his sermons using the ahadith on the second coming of Jesus, peace be on him. From this Imam I learned, for the first time, that the faith of Islam is going to be revived. At the same time I was also confused. I started asking myself questions like, “Why does the faith need to be revived when the Holy Qur'an is the perfect book and Muhammad, is the Seal of the Prophets?” The simple question was, “If this is perfect faith, what more is needed?” This Imam went on to explain the reasons for which Islam needed to be revived.

The Imam was telling us how Muslims are going to divide into 73 sects among which only one is going to be righteous. He was also telling us when Jesus returns, he is going to reestablish the system of Khilafat, or succession, and Islam is going to become the prevailing religion in the world. Then he was narrating the hardships through which the first Muslims underwent after accepting the Islam, during the life of Prophet Muhammad. He was explaining it so beautifully that while I was listening to his sermon I had a wish in my mind, “Dear Allah, if I can transfer myself to the time of Prophet Muhammad, I would

accept him and serve the Master Prophet Muhammad, without hesitating.” When I think of this today, I can say that this was the turning point for me and this is what triggered me to accept the Promised Messiah in the year 2000.

The war in Bosnia ended in 1996 after the politicians signed the peace treaty that divided our country into two entities. My village fell under the entity belonging to the Serbs. So my family and I remained refugees inside Bosnia. Life was so hard. In 1999, three years after the war, my family decided to come to the United States. Four weeks after arrival to the United States, my father died. This was very hard for us. We did not know many people in this new city, called Utica, but people still came to grieve with us. I started going to the refugee center to learn English. I asked some people to tell me the location of the mosque, so I could continue my spiritual life.

It was in the refugee center where I met a Bosnian man named Salih Drljic. I greeted him with “Salaam” and he replied with the whole of his heart. We started a conversation about Islam and it surprised me that he knew a lot. I thought, “This is the man whom I can invite to my home,” so I invited him. A couple of weeks after he came to visit me, we had coffee together and began a conversation about Islam. He told me right away, without hesitation, that he is an Ahmadi Muslim. I was confused as I heard this word “Ahmadi” for the first time in my life. I asked him to tell me more about his Ahmadiyya faith.

During our conversation I learned that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the Promised Messiah and Mahdi. He also told me that Ahmadi Muslims have reestablished the system of Khilafat and intend to unite whole Muslim Ummah, as well as all other faiths into one faith, which is Islam. Having prior knowledge about second coming of Jesus, the revival of the Islam and reestablishment of system of Khilafat, what my new friend was telling seemed to fit well.

“...you cannot return to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but you can accept his servant, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in this age and time.”

I remembered my wish from 1994 while listening to the sermon of the Hanafi Imam: “Dear Allah, if I can transfer myself to the time of Prophet Muhammad, I would accept him and serve the Master Prophet Muhammad, without hesitating.” This quick reminder was ringing in my head and I said to myself, “You cannot return to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but you can accept his servant, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in this age and time. I turned to

Salih Drljic and asked, "How can I join the Ahmadiyya Community?" From this point on, our conversation became even more interesting.

After I became an Ahmadi Muslim my life changed drastically. My spiritual life has improved and I started looking at things more rationally. I now fully understand the concept and purpose of life. In the year 2000, when I accepted Islam Ahmadiyya, I met my wife who was also a Bosnian Hanafi Muslim. I introduced her to the Promised Messiah and alhamdulillah she accepted his claim in the same year as me.

Besides gains, I have also met some challenges over time. The Ahmadiyya Community has people from all over the world. And I found it very difficult to observe that some people give more importance to some practices of Islam than to the others. My expectations were that every Ahmadi Muslim would follow the sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. For example, to my understanding, the commandments of Allah in the Holy Qur'an concerning *pardah*, or physical clothing of Muslim women, should be taken very seriously; yet I found not all Ahmadi Muslim women practiced it properly. My wife and I found it hard to accept this after coming to believe that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is best sect in Islam.

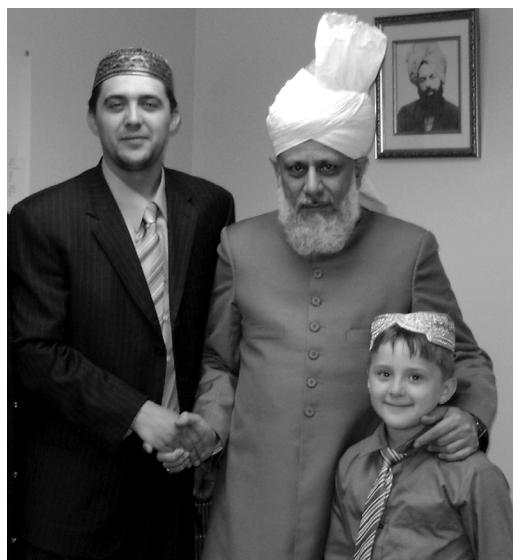
But then I learned how Ahmadiyya teachings show people how to dress, both spiritually as well as physically. We realized that the institution of Khilafat does not support the actions of individuals who do not follow Islamic practices, but rather, it supports the true teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

While my spiritual education has continued throughout my life, wartime interrupted my formal education from early childhood onwards. Not only was I unable to attend school because of the war and financial constraints, but I also lost my father upon arrival to the United States. Nonetheless, I managed to keep my spiritual life at a high level, alhamdulillah. My wife and I have both struggled in the past several years to get a college education while raising our son, Amar, who is now a first grade student. We were stretched between work and attending college. In 2008, by the grace of Allah, I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering Technology. In same year, my wife earned an Associate Degree in Health Information Management.

My spiritual life is improving as well. Since we got the new mosque in Syracuse, I have kept close ties with the Community and actively attend Friday prayers. I volunteer regularly and attend meetings at the mosque. During the annual convention in 2008, my family and I met the Fifth Khalifa for the very first time. It is very difficult for me to explain the emotional feeling I had during

this meeting. Despite the fact that hundreds of families met him, one after the other, His Holiness received us as if we were the only people who came to see him. I felt so welcomed. My son in particular was very excited to meet the Khalifa, and since then alhamdulillah he has so much love for His Holiness that he is always talking about him.

After meeting His Holiness, I realized the importance of having the Khalifa in our Community. Our dear Khalifa, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, is there to safeguard the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, and also to keep the Community united. I think it is very important for every Ahmadi Muslim to listen to the Khalifa's Friday sermons, try their best to act upon his advices, and also keep in touch with their local chapter. As I started becoming more involved in our Community's activities, my attachment to it also increased, as did the success I enjoy in life. But continuous effort is required in order to achieve any success. May Allah bless us abundantly, in both our lives. Ameen.



**Camil Cerimovic and his son meet with
His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad.**

***"Philosopher, Orator, Apostle, Legislator,
Warrior, Conqueror of Ideas, Restorer of
Rational Beliefs, of a cult without images;
the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and
of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad.
As regards all standards by which human
greatness may be measured, we may ask, is
there any man greater than he?"***

- Lamartine
Historie de la Turquie



Ismail Anani
Naperville, Illinois

**“Accepting Islam has completely transformed
my life for the better.”**

My journey to Islam began in 1982 while in Kumasi, Ghana, when I first came in contact with some Ahmadi Muslim families who lived in the same housing complex that my father, brother, and I had moved into. There, I befriended a person named Ghullam Ahmad Edusei.

On one occasion, Ghullam asked me to attend an event that some Ahmadi Muslims were having in the neighborhood. The subject of the discussion for the day was “Islam in the Bible.” The speaker on that day challenged the audience as to whether anyone amongst them could prove, using the Bible, that the true source of his or her way of worship and religious tradition came from the Bible. If so, that person would be given an award, or better still, the Ahmadi Muslim speaker would convert to that person’s faith. He went ahead and proved, from the Bible, that earlier prophets, including Jesus, practiced traces of Islamic worship and tradition. In the end, nobody in the audience dared to challenge the speaker’s arguments. After the speech, the audience applauded, and that firmly convinced me of the truthfulness of the message. I said to myself, “If no one from this large gathering of Christians and non-Muslims alike could prove that the Bible is the source of their religious worship, then I must seriously investigate becoming a Muslim myself.”

From that point on, I began attending all the local Ahmadiyya events that I could. I also began secretly joining my friends in offering prayers. I did so secretly because I did not want my father to know anything about it. After a couple of months, I also secretly started attending Friday prayers. One day, my luck ran out, as my father’s friend spotted me coming out of the mosque and

told my father about it. When my father returned home that day, he called me into his room and warned me never to step foot into any mosque, adding, “None of your ancestors has ever been a Muslim, so how dare you join the Muslims.”

After that scolding, I stopped going to the mosque, but the spirit of Islam never left me. In my heart, I was still an Ahmadi Muslim. I attended a Catholic school, and while in school, I started arguing with a classmate of mine regarding the death and divinity of Jesus Christ. One day, someone reported me to the parish priest, alleging that I had been saying “bad things” about Jesus Christ. One early morning at school, a group of students came to me and said, “Claude (which was my Christian name), Father Yeboah wants you to see him.” I wondered, “Why did Father Yeboah want to see me?” It never occurred to me that it would have anything to do with the discussions with my classmates.

I followed the students to the Church hall, and as soon as I entered the door, Father Yeboah was standing behind the door and started whipping me with a stick. By then, the students had formed a human wall behind me to prevent me from escaping through the door. I pushed them aside, and ran out of the Church. I did not tell my parents because I feared the worst happening to me.

In 1987, my friend Ghullam Edusei – a sickle cell patient – died suddenly, and when I heard the news, I was devastated. A few days after his death, knowing that my father had already forbidden me from going to the mosque, I began to wonder, “What if I were to die today...what would be my condition before Allah?” From that time, I began to think about what I needed to do to get out of my father’s house. One day, I made the decision to pack a few clothes and move out of my father’s apartment without his knowledge. My father was very strict. He raised us with a heavy hand, and thus, my older brother left the house after he reached the age of 18. I followed his lead.

The day after I left my father’s house was Friday, so I went to the mosque early, and the first person I met was an Ahmadi from a neighborhood I had lived in before. I told him of my intention to formally become a Muslim. He took me to the mission house and showed me how to perform ablution. Together, we went to the mosque and offered Friday prayers. After the service, he took me to the local missionary, who I also told of my intention.

He initiated me into the Community, and asked me to pick a new name for myself. I had already picked the name “Ismail,” on the account of its meaning and significance. According to both the Bible and Qur’an, “Ismail” means “God has heard your prayer.” When I was born, I was given the name “Mawutoe,”

which literally means “God’s property.” So when I found Islam, I was convinced that it was a result of the name Mawutoe, and that is why Allah had chosen me from amongst all my ancestors down to my father and siblings to be the first in the family to accept Islam. It is my belief that God had heard my prayer, and thus, the name Ismail was most appropriate.

After signing the pledge on February 27, 1990, I asked the missionary if there was a place where I could go to acquire Islamic knowledge. He told me about the missionary training college in Saltpond, Ghana, which used to be the National Headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. In Ghana, because of the size of the Community, neighborhoods in which there is a large concentration of Ahmadi Muslim families have their own chapter, where they attend daily prayers, except for Friday, when everyone goes to the large, main mosque in Kumasi for Friday prayers.

Now, at the age of 19, I had moved in with my mother who did not control me like my father did – she gave me more independence. From where I lived, the nearest Ahmadiyya mosque was about seven miles away. Every single day I walked the seven miles to the mosque for Isha prayers. On the same Friday that I signed the pledge, I introduced myself to the local chapter members, indicating my intention to learn.

My Qur'an instructor's name was Bashir Arthur. He is one of the best Qur'an instructors that I have ever met. He taught me for about a year before I finally had the opportunity to go to the college in Saltpond. When I went to the school, I learned that I would not have been accepted into the school unless I had a parent who would sponsor me. After the school's board of directors heard my story, one of them, a man named Jamal Johnson, was so moved that he insisted I should be accepted despite the fact that I did not meet all the criteria required to be admitted into the college. Thus, I was admitted, and I returned home to prepare to go back for the start of the semester. On my return home, I told my local chapter about it, quit my job, and went to the bank to withdraw the little money that I had. My chapter graciously contributed some funds for me to use to pay the fare going back to the college.

When the first semester ended, instead of going back to my mother's home (she as well as my siblings were very anti-Muslim), I went to stay with my Ahmadi Muslim friend's family. They adopted me as part of their own family. They and many others helped me through my days in the academy until my graduation in 1994. After graduating, I was appointed Circuit Missionary in the Northern Region of Ghana (which was a chapter of the Community in Ghana), and subsequently sent to a village where a new sub-chapter had been

created due to a large number of new converts who had joined the Ahmadiyya Community from that area. There were 15 sub-chapters in my circuit. I worked there for six years before migrating to the U.S.

In 2000, I moved to Dayton, Ohio. Like in my town back in Ghana, Dayton also had a local chapter of the truly worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. In Dayton I was charged with both spreading the message and moral training of Ahmadi Muslims. I was also responsible for organizing Community programs at the public library. Later, I moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I continued to serve the Community in various capacities, which included teaching Qur'an classes, just like my mentor Bashir Arthur.

In 2005, I moved to the Chicago suburbs. Here I have served as the leader of MKA's local chapter. In an effort to increase brotherhood, we hold biweekly breakfast meetings in the local mosque. In a friendly atmosphere, we discuss religious and general matters affecting our lives as Ahmadi youth in America, thus fostering greater brotherhood within our ranks. We have organized hiking trips and scheduled weekly educational lessons on Fridays.

Accepting Islam has completely transformed my life for the better, by the grace of God. My father also observed my transformation, and he eventually became an Ahmadi Muslim himself before I left Ghana. I am grateful to Allah for guiding me to the true Islam, and I pray that Allah will similarly open the hearts of others to Islam. May our Community be the instrument through which people are guided to Islam.

“What if I were to die today... what would my condition be before Allah?”

I hope our Christian brethren will begin to reexamine their beliefs. Nowhere in the Bible is it reported that any of God's prophets worshipped in the same manner that Christians worship today. One wonders, where did Christians get their forms of worship from? They got it from a human being (Paul, the Apostle). Christians need to realize that they cannot worship God on their own terms, but rather must worship on God's terms. I believe it is illogical for one to think that by merely believing that “Jesus Christ died for our sins” one will be granted salvation. Many people are turning away from this idea, and it is high time that we as Ahmadi Muslims stand up and present an alternative. And the best alternative is indeed Islam Ahmadiyya and Khilafat. By the grace of God, in 2008, during the visit of the Fifth Khalifa to the U.S., I was privileged

to be among a group of Khuddam who devoted two weeks to serve our Khalifa in various capacities. This blessed event offered me the opportunity to meet our present Khalifa. I said "Assalamu alaykum" to him, and we exchanged a few pleasantries – it was brief, but memorable nonetheless. It happened to be my first meeting with a sitting Khalifa. Khilafat is such a blessing – it is the pillar of our Community. Without khilafat, we would not be united all over the world. It is a powerful thing! Only the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has this unity. Our non-Ahmadi brothers must realize that if Islam is indeed the true religion from God, then it is not possible for Islam to triumph without a guiding source of unity like khilafat. This is a sign of the truth of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. It is what makes us unique!

“Surely, the Believers, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians - whichever party from among these truly believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good deeds - shall have their reward with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.”

- Holy Qur'an, 2:63



Aaron Gage
Chicago, Illinois

“My philosophy of life was similar to the Ahmadiyya Muslim motto: Love for All, Hatred for None.”

My story starts in one of the corners of our Nation, at the Homestead Air Force Base in Homestead, Florida. My father was in the Air Force. Both my parents are originally from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Shortly after I was born, when my father’s stint in the Air Force had finished, we moved back to their hometown.

Though my parents were of different religions, they agreed that I would be raised in the Jewish faith, the religion of my mother. My parents divorced when I was very young, and I lived with my mother. I was a “latchkey kid,” raised by a single parent for most of my childhood. That meant a lot of time in day care when I was younger, and a lot of time home alone, later on.

Religion was not exactly an important part of our home. We attended services on the High Holy Days and a very rare Saturday morning, but we did not follow any of the laws of Judaism at home. I went to Hebrew School two hours a day, three times a week. I learned a lot there, not because of any inherent belief in Judaism, but because I viewed it as a school and wanted to show off my ability to learn.

Shortly before my Bar Mitzvah, my grandfather died. His passing changed our perspective a little. My mother was deeply affected by the death of her father, to whom Judaism was important, and began to reexamine her own faith. We started going to Saturday morning services more regularly and she joined some Jewish community organizations. We still did not pray three times a day, keep kosher, observe the Sabbath, or participate in any fasts.

The summer after I graduated from high school, I was blessed with the chance to take a spiritual journey to Poland and Israel with a Jewish youth group I belonged to. It was a roller-coaster of a trip. In Poland, we saw the site of some of the most horrible atrocities I can imagine, while in Israel we were part of something our ancestors could only dream of – a Jewish homeland. Although conflict still surrounds the area, at the time I went, it seemed like things were on their way to being resolved. I do not believe that the trip made me closer to Judaism, but in a way, it brought me closer to Islam Ahmadiyya – I started to consider myself a pacifist, and my philosophy of life was similar to the Ahmadiyya Muslim motto of “Love for all, hatred for none.”

Looking back, it seems that Judaism was a larger part of my life growing up than I had realized. However, the focus was on identity rather than the religion itself. We took pride in being a minority, something slightly different (but not too different) to note about us in our heavily Christian town. And that was a trait that I kept with me, of my own accord, entering college. I started to wear a *yarmulke*, a traditional Jewish skullcap, but attended no services and said no prayers. Instead of devoting myself to my religion, I chose to wear something that let everyone know I was Jewish.

As time went on, I started to realize that what I identified as the Jewish religion was actually the Jewish ethnicity, and that this ethnicity was the only reason I was interested in the religion. One of the nicknames even spells out this line of thought – Jews are known as the “Chosen People,” implying that the religion is only for people who share this ethnicity. This is something that immediately drew me to Islam when I heard about it: The idea that, in Islam, it does not matter who you are or where you come from – the focus is on prayer and worship, and this really appealed to me.

When I did accept Islam, my mother was not initially approving of my choice. Judaism was an important part of her life, and while I maintained that I would still have my Jewish identity, she was concerned with how that identity would manifest itself. When I asked her how her Jewish identity manifested itself, she mentioned her support for Israel. I told her that I still supported Israel, although that did not mean I agreed with all of the State’s decisions. But I didn’t agree with all the State’s decisions before accepting Islam anyway. Rather, I supported anything that engendered peace in the region as much as the State of Israel itself. Slowly my mother became more accepting of the decision I had made.

Since accepting Islam, I have had changes of mind and heart, in my secular life as well as my religious life. As a young child, I absolutely loved football. I

told my family that I would be a football player when I grew up, not realizing that all kids probably wanted to be athletes, and not realizing it was a difficult thing to do. Once I started playing organized football, I found that I wasn't fast or strong enough to be any good – plus I was afraid of getting hit. I still love watching football, though, and I always love to cheer for my alma mater, the University of Michigan, and I watch and attend games whenever I can.

I have also had a love of music that has developed over time. I have tried to learn to play several different instruments, but have never really had the resolve to stick with it long enough to get anything out of it. Anyway, I am sure that I lack the creative ability to write original music to my satisfaction. Even so, I am always on the lookout for new music, and am willing to give anything I have never heard before a good listen.

More than football and music, I have always been interested in math. In college, even when I thought I would major in something like philosophy or sociology, I took a math class every semester. Eventually I found a specialization that interested me: actuarial mathematics. I am currently working as an actuary, for a supplemental health insurance company. While there, I make sure our policies are in compliance with state regulations, determine prices for new policies, and analyze data to test our results. While doing that, I am also studying for a series of exams and projects required to obtain my certification, a time commitment that takes almost as much time as work itself.

Before arriving at this job, however, I did have another career in mind. When I moved to Chicago, I received a teaching certificate along with my master's degree, and planned to teach math at the high school or community college level. I had a lot of fun doing this before turning to actuarial work, and found it to be a good challenge. Now that it has been almost three years since I last taught, I do miss it every once in a while.

“In Islam, it does not matter who you are or where you come from - the focus is on prayer and worship, and this really appealed to me.”

So with my professional life seeming to be in order, I turned my focus to my spiritual life. I had learned about Islam from a friend of mine, named David Rockafellow. When I heard that he had accepted Islam, I asked him about his experiences. In our talks, he told me that the mosque hosts an open house every Friday night, so I began visiting those sessions to learn about it. The

events were very informal, which was great for me, since it gave me a chance to ask a lot of questions. Atif Mian, Abdul Karim, and Naveed Malik were all very helpful in answering my questions, as well as giving me their own personal experiences and perspectives within Islam.

One thing I discovered in Islam that I had not expected was the emphasis placed on science and logic. The religions I had studied before seemed to take certain things for granted, and fought against evidence that pointed to the contrary. However, Islam seemed to look at science as something that did not have to be contrary to religion.

I formally accepted Islam and took the initiation in March 2005. I feel like a lot has changed as a result of it. I think that accepting Islam has made me more mature and driven. I have been involved with the Community on several levels and have made great friends in Chicago and across the country. Having the chance to get to know everyone in the Community has been interesting. At first it was a little challenging to fit in with everyone else, since most people were of a different race than me.

I still remember attending my first youth retreat. I arrived a little late, and found that everyone was playing sports on the grounds of a church across the street. I headed over, and before I could even meet anyone, someone came out to meet me and started to explain that they had been given permission to use the grounds, assuming I was a member of the church. I took out my prayer cap, introduced myself and then spent the rest of the time getting to know everyone there. It was there that I learned to play cricket – I didn't know what I was doing most of the time, so I spent a few hours chasing the ball around, then sat around chatting for a few more hours, then took a few turns at bat. I think that the game had really ended at that point, but I would like to think I was close to bringing our team back!

Anyway, it was fun to meet people there, and get to know people I had already met even better, and the fact that everyone was so welcoming made me feel like one of the group, and that I did not have to worry about fitting in. I would advise new converts to trust that everybody really does want to get to know them and to be willing to open themselves to others.

A highlight of my experience in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has been the chance to meet the Fifth Khalifa, Mirza Masroor Ahmad. I was at Canada's 2005 Annual Convention and waited in line with hundreds of other Muslims, all anxious for their chance to spend just a few minutes with him. As I stood in line, I could sense the excitement of others around me. It was infectious. I expected him to be intimidating. Instead, I found him to be kind,

putting me and the others I was with at ease. It was nice to personally learn that the leader of our worldwide Community was someone so approachable and humble. It was indicative of the way everyone in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community views everyone else as equals.

Family has always been something important to me, and that has continued in my life as an Ahmadi Muslim. In August 2006 I got married, and I am definitely looking forward to raising children in our Community. I want them to experience what I have experienced, by taking them to youth retreats, annual conventions, and other Community events.

My advice to those learning about Islam and about this particular Community of Muslims is to put all preconceived notions of Muslims aside, and to ask a lot of questions. There are answers available in a myriad of writings, and if that fails, you can ask anyone in the Community.



At the 29th Annual Youth Retreat of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya USA in Hudson Valley, New York, Aaron Gage tells the story of how he found Islam.

"I proclaim to all Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Aryas, that I have no enemy in the world. I love mankind with the love that a compassionate mother has for her children; even more so, I am only the enemy of the false doctrines which kill truth. Human sympathy is my duty. My principle is to discard falsehood."

***- Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
The Promised Messiah***



Abubakar Mohammed Rana
Queens, New York

“God answered many of my prayers in such miraculous ways that only I would understand.”

I was born into a Sunni Muslim family in 1980. We were not visibly religious, but we were somewhere in the middle. I do remember that my mother would impose strict discipline on my elder sister and myself in regards to good moral conduct, but we lived like other Muslims, according to the style of the culture in Bangladesh.

My family emigrated to America in 1991 through the Diversity Visa Lottery program. Everything changed for us two years later, when my mom was hit by a vehicle while she was crossing the street to go to work. She suffered severe head trauma and had brain surgery. She was put on artificial respiratory life support, never regained her eye sight and suffered permanent memory loss. From that point on, she basically lived in a vegetative stage at a long term hospital for about nine years.

Ever since my mother's accident and my sudden separation from her as a young boy, I have questioned God why it had to happen to her, as she was loved by everyone. In my eyes, she was always pious, kind and humble, and I could not understand how God could let this happen to her. Since I did not get a satisfactory answer to rest my aching heart, my belief in Allah began to deteriorate, and eventually my spiritual life suffered and became almost dead. This caused me to completely lose interest in religion.

My life then took a dramatic turn in the summer of 2002 with the sudden death of my mother. A day after I visited her, she died in her hospital bed without any physical complications. Ironically, her passing from that sad condition gave me peace in my heart because I finally felt closure. I began to offer heartfelt

prayers to Allah for my mother's salvation and high station in paradise. One day after the late evening prayer, while laying on my bed, I saw her in a dream where she was holding a baby on her side and had a bright smile and looked very happy. That image gave me some assurance that maybe Allah granted her peace in the next life.

I was truly searching for God during that period of my life, and my brother-in-law Ghulam Rabbi began to give me some literature to read. It was through him that I was introduced to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. What impressed me about this Community was that they did not discriminate against others and even agreed to take care of my mother's funeral arrangements, despite the fact that she was not an Ahmadi Muslim. Rather, the Ahmadi Muslims just said, if she had lived long enough, she might have had the chance to accept the Promised Messiah.

After their gracious service, I began to visit the Ahmadiyya mosque in Queens frequently for the Friday prayer service and during Ramadhan, the month of fasting. During that time, I lived in Brooklyn and would travel to Queens and my sister and Ghulam's home. I was off from college during that summer and not working.

My brother-in-law gave me a book to read entitled *Life of Muhammad* written by the Second Khalifa, and it was the first time that I actually learned facts about the life of the Prophet Muhammad, including a brief history of early Islam. The second book I read was *Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian* by Iain Adamson. Before reading this book, I did not know who Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was, or what he represented. After I read about his life, I felt very impressed with this pious man, whose life resembled the Holy Prophet Muhammad. My third book was *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*.

The more I read the writings of Ahmadi scholars, the more I was impressed by their simple explanations of the beautiful teachings of Islam. This new perspective was logical and very different from the mainstream Muslim leadership that I came across in other Sunni mosques. I always had reservations about the way mainstream Muslim clergy represented Islam, including the hate that they held for other religions and the contradiction between their words and actions. This always made me cringe, and I was concerned about the future of the religion of Islam in their hands.

But my encounters with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community offered hope. Every time I would attend an event or Friday prayer service, I would always leave with more knowledge, love and appreciation for Islam. Most importantly, I would leave with a true way to find and connect to the Creator

directly. I noticed that this Community adhered to one man who was called khalifa, but whenever I would hear that word it would confuse me. Growing up I had only heard that title given to the first four successors of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It was still not clear to me what the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was, but I knew I liked being among them at their mosque, and the members were very friendly, genuine and trustworthy. Their face, behavior and graciousness projected an image that was wholesome and pure, and I became very attracted to that.

I asked my brother-in-law how I could become a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, so he gave me another book to read, which explains the conditions of being an Ahmadi Muslim. I could not disagree with any one of those conditions, and I felt in my heart that those 10 conditions were logical, perfectly aligned with the teachings of Allah and the only way to attain righteousness.

The essential question I had in my mind was the difference in teachings between this Community and other Muslims, and why others did not join this Community en masse. I began to ask myself if the teachings by the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community were any different from the teachings of the Holy Prophet. I asked myself if the Ahmadiyya version of Islam was the same Islam of the Holy Prophet.

I felt that these questions were answered by a dream that I had thereafter. I saw that I was on an island similar to the one where my mother's hospital was located (Roosevelt Island), and a war had started. Big battleships were passing by and enemies were jumping out of the ships and onto the island where I was stood. I felt that my life was in danger and began to run. A few other people and I found a small dark room. When I went inside, there was an empty bed with no mattress, and we all knelt down facing the bed, with our backs towards the door.

I then felt someone pointing a gun in the back of my head and knew at any moment they would pull the trigger. At that moment, I immediately began to repeat the *Kalima Shahaadah* (the Muslim declaration of faith) loudly and quickly. The only thought going through my mind was that before the gun goes off to kill me, I want to remember God and His prophet, Muhammad. Suddenly, I heard someone from behind me attack the person that was holding the gun. I was saved and able to came out of that dark room alive. I felt like this was the answer to my question that the Islam that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad preached is indeed the same Islam and the same Kalima of the Holy Prophet.

I did not hesitate any longer and very soon decided to sign the initiation form in order to join the Community.

My spiritual life began to recover and my recognition of, and faith in, God became real as I read more writings of the Promised Messiah, and each khalifa that succeeded him. God answered many of my prayers in such miraculous ways that only I would understand.

Just before I joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, I got my first real job with a small private company and was able to make financial sacrifices for my faith. The financial contribution that I was able to give in the cause of Allah made me feel very good since I was not able to sacrifice my service to the Community any other way, at the time.

I never doubted my decision to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community because I truly fell in love with the founder of the Community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. At first, I did not understand the institution of Khilafat, but I did find the Fourth Khalifa lovely and felt proud to have him as our spiritual leader, and felt very safe to be in association with his religious Community.

Luckily, my joining this Community was made easy because my family never pressured me to reverse my decision. My father had already joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community a couple of years before I did, though he never influenced nor encouraged me to do the same.

One of the challenges that I had to face after becoming an Ahmadi Muslim was to refrain from telling lies. Not that it was my habit to tell lies before I accepted, but I was evermore watchful of this bad trait. Another challenge I faced was to put into action what I believed in, so as not to be a hypocrite in the sight of God, or others. My non-Ahmadi friends respect me now more than before because of my true sincerity for God and His creatures.

“What impressed me about this Community was that they did not discriminate against others and even agreed to take care of my mother’s funeral arrangements, despite the fact that she was not an Ahmadi Muslim.”

I wrote to the Khalifa, saying I had been engaged to a Sunni Muslim girl in Bangladesh, and rather than suggest I break it off, he ever wisely gave me permission to marry her. In 2006 an Ahmadi Imam married us in Dhaka,

Bangladesh. My wife was already a practicing Muslim, but I never compelled her to join the Community. She wanted to have the time and opportunity to study Ahmadiyya beliefs before deciding whether or not to join. So she spent time studying and interacting with Ahmadi ladies at meetings. By the grace of Allah, a year after she came to America, she also decided to become an Ahmadi Muslim.

Now my life feels so much more secure, and my faith in Allah is so much stronger than ever before. I truly believe that the Ahmadiyya Community was established by God through the Promised Messiah. Being a member of this religious Community, I am on the right path towards paradise, and not hell, as the Holy Prophet Muhammad prophesized that the community of his Messiah and Mahdi would be on the right path, and the rest of the Muslim sects would not be. Now my prayers and sacrifices have become pleasurable.

I feel very blessed to be a part of MKA. By serving the Community through MKA, I can make my contribution to the best of my capacity in the sight of Allah. I am currently the Director of Volunteerism for the Queens chapter.

In my heart, I feel no fear for the future of Islam since I know it is in the hands of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I know that the founder of our Community is a true messenger of Allah, and with the help of Allah, his followers will demonstrate the real beauty of Islam throughout the world, now and forever.

“And when thou hast made up thy mind considering a matter, then put thy trust in Allah. Surely, Allah loves those who put their trust in Him.”

- Holy Qur'an, 3:160



Tariq Tamir
Chicago, Illinois

**"He wasn't just holding my hand
he was holding my heart."**

I am from Chicago, born and raised, more or less. You could say my parents are Sunni Muslims. They followed Warith Deen Mohammed, the son of Elijah Muhammad, who succeeded his father as head of the Nation of Islam (NOI). I went to Sister Clara Muhammad School, named after W.D. Muhammad's mother. I got kicked out of it for fighting, in Kindergarten. Waalee Muhammad and I were fighting over a girl. We fought just after naptime, the teacher broke it up, and my parents were called. A week later: public school.

Public school was a culture shock. I had spent my entire life before then in the company of Muslims – at home and school. Granted it was just five years, but it still had an impact. I had no idea people could be so different. I learned the hard way how to live in an un-Islamic society. I picked up swearing, but I was never really good at it. Since everyone was different from me, I had to adjust to their way of doing things. For the next eight years, I was pretty lonely. I never really fit in. I got into a couple fights (again), made a few friends. I lost both fights, by the way.

I had a friend named Dion and he was really good at spelling. We were friends, almost good friends, but I got jealous of his spelling prowess, so once I fed him the wrong word in order to win a spelling bee myself. One day, he moved away and that was it. I never wondered about him after that, until I got older, and I realized I had been a bad friend. I had developed this thing in my head, that it was me against "them," so I decided to do him in.

High school was another culture shock. I had a lot of peer pressure. The big thing was how many girls liked you. If they liked you, you were cool. If they

didn't, you were an outcast. In my freshman year I was picked on and bullied. I was small, I didn't look or talk like anyone else. My Islamic identity always made me different, the other. I would be tested regularly. I had to make up my mind: "Hey, do I want to be different for the rest of my life?"

All the while, I was not religious. Islam was my religion and that was it. I defended it because I was teased about it, and that was one reason I fought. I only prayed when we went to mosque, but I always believed in God, in Allah. But there is so much more to do for a 14-year-old in high school, like looking good and being cool, that religion was not a priority.

At the time, my father was an Imam. He was fluent in Arabic, and he taught us, along with one other family, on a weekly basis, but I rebelled against him because I felt he was not worthy – no earthen man could teach me. "He's just a mortal, he doesn't know," I would tell myself. You have to understand that Elijah Muhammad had deified a man named W.D. Fard, the founder of NOI. So that is why I was never high on humans speaking for God.

Anyways, I was a junior now, trying to fit in. I tried to start dating around my junior year, basically because I needed a prom date. And if you didn't have a girlfriend, you were lame. Mostly I just got into a lot of trouble. I found a prom date. I should mention there was also no real separation between men and women in my religious community, so meeting girls, potential wives, was not a problem. We could mingle after prayers, and so on. In fact, my parents lined up a few girls. Dating was also not frowned upon by my parents, just so long as they believed in one God. They preferred a Muslim, of course. By the time I graduated high school, I had become popular.

In college, I was exposed to even more popular culture. I began to feel less and less like a Muslim, and more and more like "one of them." I had to catch myself at that stage. I had no idea that I was changing at that time. That I was maturing. My spirituality was still soft.

At 21, I got my first car, which I had to pay for. It was great because of the independence it gave me, but things were not working out. I was having car troubles, and I couldn't afford the payments either. So I did the only thing I could: I started praying. Yes, I turned to God only when I began having car trouble. I remember thinking, "God You've always been there, although I haven't always done my part. But if You just help me with this, I'll pay more attention, I'll be a better Muslim." And you know what, I noticed my prayers began working right away. So I started reading the Qur'an more, praying more, and felt it all open up to me. I like to think of those early days as the "template of my life." I received a lot of signs then.

In 2004 I got married because of family pressure. They were like, "This is what you need to do." It was not great. I hated it. It lasted a year. I left the relationship, and in fact the whole community. I was still getting to know Allah, but I could not return to Friday service at my old mosque. That's when I recalled seeing a mosque along the I-290 expressway, on Van Buren Street. I needed another place to go, and that would be it.

I attended my first service in June of 2005 and knew this was the place for me. I did not know it was an Ahmadiyya mission house at the time, but I knew it was home. It was not the teachings that led me to join the Community – it was the people. The people were so warm and gracious and took me in. Initially I saw that they were praying like I was praying (in the Sunni style), they were offering *Tahajjad* (optional early morning) prayers like me, and I was like, yeah, this feels right. But then I met Naveed Malik, and he just became the voice of the Ahmadiyya Community for me. I said to myself, "Look at him up there, he's preaching a good game, and I said, this is it. This is where I have to be."

I wanted to sign the initiation form right away, but Atif Mian, a convert himself, advised that I spend some time studying and thinking about it. I joined the Community the following month at Atif's home, with a group of brothers. It was July 2005. In truth, I signed it on blind faith that this is what Allah wanted me to do, and I did. Four years later, I do not regret it. I felt, "If I am being guided and He's showing me what I need to do, I have to do it." I actually considered myself an Ahmadi Muslim after that first Friday service I attended back in June. That is where my old life ended, and my new life began.

In June I had attended the Canadian Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention, which was presided over by the Fifth Khalifa. It was the best convention ever. I was in a community of people I had just met, but even then I felt a real kinship. It was really nice. And you know that other family we used to study Arabic with every week? All these years later I ran into them again: they had become Ahmadi Muslims as well. I took that as another sign.

Aside from the speeches, prayers and brotherhood, we got to meet the Khalifa. Before I met him, I did not know what to think. Mind you, I came from WD Muhammad's sect, where a man's word was the 'be all, end all'. So I was never impressed with placing faith in people. That said, when I met him, I immediately felt that he was a genuine man of God. I cannot explain it in words, but there is this warmth you can feel, even for the two seconds you touch someone's hand. And when he held my hand, I was like...well, I felt loved. He wasn't just holding my hand, he was holding my heart.

Back in Chicago, I continued my study of the Ahmadiyya Community. Growing up I was avid reader, absorbing most of the world through books. When I first joined the Community, however, I was not inspired to read. The books I did read were *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* and *A Man of God* – the latter I had to read in four days because Naveed said he had to give his copy to someone else afterward, so I did! That book really made me feel that I had missed out on the Fourth Khalifa. Through his story, I also gained an appreciation for people.

When I came into the Ahmadiyya Community initially, I had left the back door open. I was not surprised that Satan got in, and the glitter began to fade. I did not connect with everyone the way I did with some brothers. (Connecting with anyone was a big deal for me.) I felt brothers giving me dirty looks. I started falling back into my pattern of making and breaking relationships.

Three years into the Community, despite all the good, I had built up some bad karma, and began looking for a way out. Yet every time I made an effort to leave, I kept ending up right back to being a humble servant of Islam in the Ahmadiyya Community. No matter what I said to myself, “These folks aren’t genuine, etc.” I could not make myself leave. Once I was driving, and I came to a fork in the road: one road led to certain fun and the other Al-Sadiq Mosque. Well I opted for fun, and guess what: I got pulled over by the police! I thought to myself, “If I had just gone to the mosque, I would not have gotten in trouble.” These sorts of signs helped me realize that this was the place to be.

That experience was actually a good check for me. It had become about the brotherhood – I hadn’t had friends in so long that the brotherhood was enough for me to keep going. But then, brothers started moving away. I did not want my faith to be based on a body of people, who can come and go. That was a catalyst for me to learn more about Ahmadiyya beliefs.

After everything is wiped away, is it about friends, or about attaining salvation, and returning to your Maker? The brotherhood was good, and is good, but I realized that this can come and go, but what’s real is my faith. Soon I had a moment of clarity about the principle issue today’s clerics raise against the Promised Messiah – the notion that Muhammad is the last messenger ever. I took that as a sign. Today I am confident in both the beliefs and the people that make up the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Still, I am tested day in and day out. After joining the Community, I stopped a lot of bad habits, including backbiting and judging people. I have become more mature, aware of my place in Islam and of my relationship with Allah, and more accepting and appreciative of people. I am better at praying now as well.



Miguel David Cáliz
Guayanilla, Puerto Rico

**“... it was so beautiful to see people of
different races as brothers.”**

I was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in 1980. I currently live in my hometown of Guayanilla, Puerto Rico, where I am a graduate student. I will present you some aspects of my life that make me the Ahmadi Muslim that I am today.

I was born into a Christian family and I was raised a Catholic. I studied in Catholic schools until high school. My childhood was easygoing. Despite all the rules of the Catholic Church I enjoyed junior high. Though I was devoted back then, I still had a lot of trouble believing that Jesus was part of God, and that he resurrected after being dead for three days...it troubled my mind. I tried not to think much about it because I knew I had no answer for it. I really encountered problems with my faith in high school, when I tried to make sense of it all.

I have always thought that dedicating your life to God is a great honor, so it passed my mind to become a priest, but since priests cannot marry, that was an automatic no. This was my first issue with the Church – it makes no sense to negate the right to get married to a man that wants to dedicate his life to serve God. God created man and woman to be each other's companion – negating their right to marry is a tremendous error, in my opinion; indeed scandals concerning harassment and abuse are destroying the Catholic Church's image.

My second big issue with the Church was the worshipping of, and supplications to, Mary. If the Church believes in God then why pray to Mary? It made no sense to me, and I felt as if it was an affront to God. They have forgotten the first and second commandments. These two reasons led me stop going to church. There were more of course, but my story is not about the Catholic Church, it is about Islam...we will get there soon.

The best way to appreciate Islam is to live without it. And this is what I experienced when I stopped going to church. Living without any guidance leaves you vulnerable to the actions of the masses, even if they are completely wrong. So I began doing what others were doing.

I was 18, in college, so I tried smoking and drinking. It seems like fun in the beginning, but is indeed a bad habit. Besides that, it is hazardous for your health. What troubled me most was the feeling afterward of having accomplished absolutely nothing. This was a desperate time for me. I was now 20, felt depressed and nothing made me happy. That is when I decided to make a change in my life. Some childhood friends of mine were in Milwaukee, enrolled at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). So in 2002, I decided to visit them, hoping to stay and transfer to UWM, and thank God that's what happened.

I was always curious about Islam, but never got the chance to learn about it. What really piqued my curiosity was the escalation of terrorism in Iraq, due to the Iraq War. I just could not believe that an ideology of suicide and killing of the innocent came from God. Of course I did not believe this is what Islam was, but I wanted to hear from a Muslim that this is completely wrong. So far, Muslims around the world have not come together as one voice to defend the teachings of Islam, and condemn terrorism. They defend the honor of the Prophet, but they don't defend his teachings. The only sect of Islam which actually condemns these acts, and talks about it freely, and also defends and preaches the true teachings of Islam – knowing with full faith that Islam is the key to mankind's prosperity – is the one which carries the motto, "Love for all, hatred for none," the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

The first Muslim that I met was actually Ahmadi. I met him when I was a student at UWM. I used to tutor him in math, which was my job at the time. We started discussing the Iraq War and terrorism when he said that his Community has proof from the Qur'an that terrorism is completely wrong and not permissible in Islam. For me this was big, because later I met other Muslims who were good people and also condemned terrorism, but they could not say the same for their sects, nor speak for them. For example, what Muslim can speak on behalf of all Shi'ites, or on behalf of all Sunnis? His point on his entire Community condemning terrorism grabbed my attention big time.

After that we met occasionally in school and talked about religion from time to time. Another intriguing point he made was that Jesus did not die on the cross. This was also huge because as I mentioned earlier, I already had trouble believing in the resurrection and the divinity of Jesus.

Then I met an Ahmadi imam named Rashid Ahmad. His devotion, love for God, defense of Jesus from false accusations and perceptions, and his wisdom truly amazed me. Learning religion from this man was an opportunity I could not refuse, especially with the issues I had with religion in the past. I had never met someone like him. His spirituality was something that I never perceived before. They invited me to their mosque, so I went with no fear and no doubt.

In the mosque I met great, loving people who treated me with tenderness. This love and affection kept me attending. At the beginning I was not very interested in the misconceptions of Jesus or the prophethood of the Promised Messiah. What I wanted to know was, who was Muhammad? And what kind of God do they believe in? After three lessons, that is, about three Fridays, I knew that I was in the right place. They believed in what I believed: One God Who is the Creator of heaven and earth, Who also created the angels and everything in the universe, and has no partners, Who sent prophets for the benefit of mankind, Who is Gracious, Merciful, and Just, among many other attributes.

With a clear understanding of these attributes of God, it is not hard to believe in a universal prophet, the Holy Prophet Muhammad. This is the distinguishing feature of Muhammad from past prophets. It is also the main reason I remained interested in Islam. The stories I heard about him in the mosque, in sermons and in articles were so inspiring that I could never have enough and wanted to hear more and more. The feeling of peace and tranquility after Friday prayers was also something that I had never felt before.

So I kept going, pretty much feeling like a Muslim, though I was still learning about Islam. I was in the midst of a serious conflict: on one hand I had acknowledged the true teachings of Islam and the unity of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, but on the other hand I was not ready for such a big change in my life, especially as I was planning to move back to Puerto Rico for graduate school, and there was no Ahmadiyya Community back home.

In 2006, I went to the MKA *Ijtema* – their youth retreat. There I experienced something special; the love and the unity that I saw was a sight to behold. There I learned that Islam was not only a religion, but a way of life, designed to help you get closer to God. This confused me further; how would I be able to change my way of life when eventually I was going to be by myself? It troubled me deeply.

I accepted the Conditions of Initiation before leaving for Puerto Rico, still feeling uncertain. This feeling wore off quickly. I read just three pages of the Holy Qur'an and I recognized that this was the work of the Almighty. I quickly felt relieved, that I have nothing to fear about, and that He would not

leave me alone and helpless. That strengthened my faith and helped me decide with certainty to return home and tell the people of Puerto Rico about the truthfulness of the Holy Qur'an.

I was back in Puerto Rico, no Muslims in sight. It was really hard to be away from my Muslim brothers after having been a part of their Community. I read two books of the Promised Messiah which removed the last doubts in my mind: *Jesus in India* and *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. At this point I had reviewed everything. Could I call myself a true Muslim? Do I really believe everything in Islam? Am I ready to tell the people that I am a Muslim and defend Islam? What I find amazing is that Islam does not impose anything mindlessly – everything has a reason.

In 2008 I returned to the U.S. to attend the annual convention, which was special that year because we were going to be in the presence of the Khalifa. I also got a rare chance to meet the Khalifa. I met him with my personal teacher, Imam Rashid Ahmad. I met with him for less than a minute; we basically introduced ourselves and that was it. But what I perceived from him was something out of this world; it was like being in the presence of a prophet. He was so highly spiritually advanced that just from his handshake I felt good energy pass into me. This is my testimony regarding the Khalifa; even my voice got clearer, and ever since then, my spirituality has increased dramatically.

The sights and sounds of the convention were also breathtaking; it was so beautiful to see people of different races as brothers. This is another aspect that I love about Islam: the brotherhood. In Islam we are all brothers and there is no distinction of race or social class.

After the convention I returned to Puerto Rico to continue my studies. I became the first person to sign the pledge to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Puerto Rico, with God as my witness. We are planning to form a chapter here soon, God willing.

If there is anything out there that Puerto Rico needs, it is Islam. That is how I feel. When I accepted Islam, it freed me. As the saying goes, the truth will set you free. When you learn the truth, you break the chains of mental slavery. We suffer from an economy dependent almost entirely on American aid. Issues like drug trafficking, gang violence, teen pregnancy, unwed mothers and disease are tearing us down. When I think about how Prophet Muhammad brought together the scattered, warring, immoral people of Arabia together, and how they adopted the highest moral code and how they then became the greatest civilization on earth, I am hopeful, that one day, Puerto Rico will also make similar progress under the banner of Islam.

I may not have discussed Islamic beliefs in detail, but suffice it for me to say that the Holy Qur'an and *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* should be your guides, as they are mine. From just three pages of the Qur'an I recognized the Word of God, and in 45 seconds I recognized a holy man. No truth has come to me at such a fast pace. How could I not join them? I would be really unjust and a fool if I had not. I hope that my story and testimony help those who need that little last convincing to accept Islam and join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Peace to all! Ameen.



At the 2006 Youth Retreat of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya USA, Miguel Caliz with another convert to Islam, Rashid Ahmad.

"Every distinction or privilege, whether pertaining to color, race or caste, or derived from family, rank or wealth, is abolished. Islam makes all mankind one great brotherhood, and exhorts all of us to seek and win the pleasure of God through the righteousness and beneficence of our conduct towards each other."

- Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan
16th Congress of International Association
for Religious Freedom



Omer Fahim Shiekh
Houston, Texas

“Little did I know that I would find more than just answers at this website, I would find the truth.”

I was born in Karachi, Pakistan to a Sunni Muslim family. I arrived in the United States in June 1996, settling in California. In December, I went back to Pakistan and got married. We had a son, Hamza, who was born the following year in Pakistan. It had been three years since our marriage and my wife's visa had still not been granted to move to America. In the meanwhile I had moved to Houston to live with my brother. One day, news came that my wife and son had been in a car accident. My wife used her body to shield my son as her car rolled over. I immediately flew to Pakistan, hoping for positive news upon my landing. My son survived with no injuries, but my wife died 15 days later. I packed up my son's few possessions and brought him to live with me in Houston.

I first heard about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community from all the propaganda against it in Pakistan. Though I knew little about the Community, I knew that I did not like the people who spoke ill of Ahmadi Muslims. Their insults did not distance me from the Ahmadiyya Community; rather, they led me to dissociate from whomever made them. I got some information from an Ahmadi Muslim friend once, but I did not take any interest. I used to go to his house often because I liked the family. They were kind and welcoming people. People would ask me, “Why do you go to the home of these disbelievers?” I would reply that I found nothing wrong with them.

Out of curiosity one day, I asked this Ahmadi friend some questions. Eventually, he directed me to alislam.org. Little did I know that I would find more than just answers at this website – I would find the truth. In 2002, I took

his advice and browsed through alislam.org. I found a section with questions posed to the Fourth Khalifa. There were only thirteen questions but they affected me greatly. Because I was in my brother's house, I kept my door closed as I repeatedly listened to the truth and logic in the Khalifa's answers regarding Prophet Jesus and the anti-Christ. I realized that everything I had been taught about these subjects was fictional and illogical.

This newfound awareness further sparked my curiosity. I needed more of this truth. Throughout this experience, I prayed to Allah to help me learn more about Ahmadiyya beliefs. I found the address to an Ahmadiyya mosque on the internet and embarked upon the next stage of my journey. I was constantly praying to Allah during the 30-mile drive to the mosque.

Upon arrival, I met with Imam Zafar Sarwar. He seated me and asked me to wait a few minutes for him to return. As I waited, I saw a series of pictures high on a shelf depicting a man known as the Promised Messiah and his successors. This picture of the Promised Messiah enthralled me. I had never seen his picture before. Out of no conscious action, I removed my shoes, stood on a chair, took a hold of the picture, and kissed it. It was automatic. The feelings will always be unexplainable but they solidified what I knew deep down.

When Imam Sarwar returned, I asked a few questions that he answered. He also gave me some books to read. I hid those books from my family and read them in whatever free time I had at work or at home. *Selected Writings of The Promised Messiah* moved me deeply. I wept when I read the beautiful words the Promised Messiah used to describe Prophet Muhammad. I had never heard such descriptions of Prophet Muhammad. I realized that those who openly express their hatred for the Promised Messiah are at a loss because they completely miss the love he had for the Prophet Muhammad. After having been away from the mosque for one day, I returned and asked Imam Sarwar to be initiated into the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

I had lived with my brother and family for two years before becoming an Ahmadi Muslim. In those two years, we had always attended a non-Ahmadiyya mosque for Friday prayers. But now, I was attending an Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque. My family wondered what had happened to me so they followed me and found out that I attended an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque. Afterward, they made my life difficult. They took me to a Sunni mosque to meet with mullahs (clerics). I repeatedly affirmed the truth of the Promised Messiah, just as Bilal had repeated, "Ahad, Ahad" (literally "One, One," as in the One God), when his tormentors tortured him to renounce Islam.

I talked with the head mullah for half an hour. While he kept telling me I was wrong, I remained silent, praying. At one point, the mullah said, "The Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet so no more prophecies will come." He became flustered when I asked him to show me where the Qur'an states that prophecies have finished. The mullah also said that revelations only came to prophets. I instantly said, "If only prophets receive revelations, then why does Allah say in the Qur'an that he sends revelations to the honeybee? Mary, mother of the Prophet Jesus, also received a revelation and she was not a prophet."

The mullah told my brother to perform '*Umrah*, the lesser pilgrimage, because this would be the only way to bring me "back to Islam." Throughout the pilgrimage my brother was constantly asking if I had found the truth. I remained silent all nine days while praying for him and my family. Afterward, I told him that I had found the truth, which pleased him. When I told him I was referring to Ahmadiyya beliefs, he tried to force me to renounce my faith. I responded by saying that Ahmadiyya is the true Islam. He became angry.

The anger spread to the rest of my family. They told me that I was hopeless if I could not find truth in the Ka'ba. My mother even said, "You can become Hindu or Christian and we would accept you; but if you become Ahmadi, we can never accept you." After this, they beat me badly, threw my things in my car, and kicked me out of the house.

"Although this experience hurt me emotionally and physically, it did not bruise my confidence in the truth and that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is indeed Allah's Community."

Although this experience hurt me emotionally and physically, it did not bruise my confidence in the truth and that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is indeed Allah's Community. Allah had helped me so much, and He showed no signs in stopping. Later, Imam Sarwar encouraged me to remarry so that my son could have a mother and I could have a wife. One of my friends knew an Ahmadi Muslim family in Pakistan who had a daughter living in Germany. The parents allowed me to stay with them in Pakistan for nine days. The parents were pleased with my references and approved. By Allah's grace, I married into this family in 2003. My wife's great-grandfather, Sheikh Yaqoob Ali Irfani, and both of her grandfathers, Sheikh Mubarak Ismail and Sheikh Abdul Ghafoor, were companions of the Promised Messiah.

I took my son and moved to Germany in 2003. We lived there for two years while I worked for the U.S. Army. In 2005, we returned to Houston, Texas. In 2008, we were blessed with a son. Now we have two sons and a very happy family.

But those two years in Germany did not pass so smoothly. After my marriage in 2003, I went to my home in Pakistan. It had been years since I was last there. Things quickly became grim when I received a call from the security guard at the door. He said, "There are two men who want to see you." I found this curious because I had not been in Pakistan for years and had told practically no one of my return. I asked, "What do they look like?" He replied, "They are big and look intimidating. They are wearing heavy jackets." The comment on their jackets alerted me. It was incredibly hot and they were wearing jackets? I asked, "Does it look like they have guns underneath their jackets?" The security guard replied that it indeed seemed so. My relatives and friends in America must have told people that I, a new Ahmadi Muslim, would be in Pakistan. I grabbed my things and ran out the back door to an aunt's house, thankfully escaping with my life.

Also, in 2003, the Fourth Khalifa passed away. This was hard for me because I had always wanted to meet the only living person I had ever called my role model. His logic, speech, and intelligence had attracted me to the Community, but now I would never get to meet him. I was determined to at least go to his funeral. So, from Germany, I went to France and met my brother-in-law. Then, we both traveled to England for the funeral. While at the London Mosque, a question and answer session was playing. Upon seeing this, I instantly began to weep. The world had lost a renaissance man that week.

However, all was not lost. This was a special time. I had only been an Ahmadi Muslim for a short time and here I was, among the throngs of people in the streets, outside the London Mosque, experiencing the election of next khalifa. Upon election as the Fifth Khalifa, Mirza Masroor Ahmad wished to say a few words and said to the people in the small mosque, "Sit down." And everybody – not just the hundred or so in the mosque, but the thousands flooding the streets around it – not only sat down immediately, but also became pin drop silent. This act of united obedience to Khilafat was absolutely marvelous to experience.

Later on, I got to meet the Fifth Khalifa. Before entering his office, I could not think of what to say. However, after greeting each other, we had a terrific conversation. I was impressed by the spiritual light that flowed from him. He is truly a magnificent person.

I am connected to him and people all across the globe, through MKA. I am constantly impressed by khuddam's abilities as they have helped me many times. One fascinating thing that I have seen only in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Ka'ba is what happens during dinnertime. When you have a large gathering eating food, the floor will become dirty. However, what I have seen is that the youth emerge like a well-oiled machine and clean the floor cleaner than it was before. This is only achieved through unity. To make a village, community, or state function, one needs unity. I have seen this unity in the Ahmadiyya Musllim Community.

Present day. My entire family, with the exception of my father, has not talked to me for over five years. They said, "We will only talk to you if you become non-Ahmadi." My father, Additional Secretary of Education in Karachi, Pakistan with a PhD in political science, is knowledgeable in secular and spiritual matters. He has written books about the Muslim League, the founder of Pakistan, and even a commentary of the Qur'an. He tutored me all throughout my life. After becoming an Ahmadi Muslim, the time came for me to tutor him. I discussed Jesus' death and provided proof through eleven verses of the Holy Qur'an, as explained by the Promised Messiah. He did not insult the Promised Messiah, but he could only reply, "Ahmadiyya beliefs are wrong," yet offer no support for his position. However, he said, "I believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a spiritual leader but I cannot say that he is a messenger of Allah or prophet."

My family and all other enemies of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community have been unable to present Qur'anic proof to disprove our beliefs. I know that this will never happen because Islam Ahmadiyya is the truth. As such, I am always praying that Allah show the bright light of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to my family and every non-Ahmadi Muslim.

***“Swords can win territories, but not hearts.
Force can bend heads, but not minds.”***

***- Mirza Tahir Ahmad
The Fourth Khalifa***



Edvin Bajrektarevic
Ankeny, Iowa

**“I always knew I was a Muslim
but now it meant something.”**

I was born in 1976 in Doboj, Yugoslavia (present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina). I am the eldest child in a four-person family. While I was born into a Muslim family, I had not been raised in a religious manner. Sure I knew about Ramadhan, Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur'an, but like my parents, I never practiced Islam as a religion. My only 'religious practice' consisted of visiting my grandparents on Eid to get gifts from them and other elderly people. (That, I did religiously.)

In 1992, when I was 15 years old, war broke out in Bosnia, between Serbs and Bosnians. At this point, religion rapidly came into my life. As Bosnians were also Muslim, I began to hear everyone say "Islam," "Muslim this" "Muslim that." I always knew I was Muslim, but now it meant something. Something that would cause us to flee our homes and become refugees. We escaped the Serbian aggression without being harmed, and began living in a refugee camp.

This is where my first ever encounter with the Qur'an took place. My father had gotten hold of a Qur'an from a religious organization, and put it in our room at the refugee camp. That Book was just sitting there on the shelf, and I said to myself, "It will not just sit there, I will read it," and that was it. I took initiative to read it myself – no one else told me to do it.

Even before reading the Qur'an, I had grown up hearing Muhammad was the last prophet. I always wondered, "Why do we not have prophets anymore? Why is he the last prophet?" In any case, I also learned my prayers from people at the camp. As it happened, Ramadhan was also on the way. When it came, I started going to the mosque for *Taraweeh* (special prayers offered during Ramadhan) regularly.

Whenever I went to mosque, despite being a new member, I never got a chance to speak to the Imam. There was no welcome. Just the elders got to shake his hand and chat with him. The young people could not talk, could not ask questions, or even go to front – we prayed in the back. But I am a curious person, if I don't know I want to ask. I am always asking. Little by little, because no one was speaking to me, answering my questions or teaching me, I started to withdraw. I stopped going to the mosque, and eventually I stopped saying my prayers, opting to enjoy whatever nightlife we had with friends.

In 1997, the war now over, we moved to the capital, Sarajevo. I made a friend who was very outgoing and knew a lot of people around town. He told me he knew of three Pakistanis who have a business nearby. One of them was carrying out humanitarian health work, so maybe he could give us jobs. My friend, brother Edin, and I went to see him. The first time we met, no job. When we visited a second time, because I was speaking a little more English, I stayed and got the job. This person also happened to be an Ahmadi Muslim. He taught me about religion, how Prophet Jesus had died, and how prophets could come after Prophet Muhammad.

First of all, I never knew that Muslims ever believed that Jesus was alive in heaven in the first place, or that Muslims were broken up into sects. I was deeply concerned that Muslims believed Jesus was alive in Heaven, just like Christians. So all this was new to me, as was learning of prophets coming after the Prophet of Islam. “They believe in a prophet after Muhammad,” I said to myself, in alarm. I immediately got put off to conversation. I was surprised because my entire life all I heard was, “last, last, last.”

Nonetheless I continued a cautious study of Ahmadiyya beliefs. For a year I read up on the Community’s beliefs – the first books I read were the Ahmadiyya commentary of the Qur'an, as well as *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. This book surprised me; it lifted my spirits and gave me a push in the right direction. I started to say my prayers again.

What had initially held me back was the issue of finality of prophethood. It's funny, I always thought it did not make sense that there are no prophets after Prophet Muhammad. Yet, as soon as I heard someone say there was a prophet after him, my training from childhood automatically kicked in and I hesitated. But I got past that indoctrination and over time, I studied with an open mind, and I prayed with an open heart, and I found Islam Ahmadiyya to be the truth.

I took the pledge and joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 1998. I was the first Ahmadi Muslim in all of Sarajevo. I began spreading the

message by speaking with my brother and friends. In time, my brother and five of my friends also took the pledge. We were such a strong group. We were already friends, but when we began going to mosque together, we became as brothers.

Life got better after I joined the Community. I found a new job, we moved into to a nice apartment, and we all felt a real improvement in ourselves. Before, we were struggling in life, but I felt it my gut that this was not the end. With prayers, you do not get what you seek overnight. It takes time. For some time we remained patient, then we suddenly got our jobs, the apartment, and even my parents found work. I believe all this came to pass because we stuck with it.

While I working for a company, I got word that the Community needed people to work for the Community full time in Bosnia. The local missionary asked me to quit my job and begin working for the Community. I told him I did not like the idea of getting a paycheck to serve my faith, and then spend in the cause of Allah from those funds, already coming from the Community. He assured me this was fine as that is how it is for himself as a missionary as well, so after thinking it over, I went for it. I became the first Bosnian to work for Community. Our first and most wonderful task was to fill up our backpacks with books and walk around sharing the message of Islam Ahmadiyya.

In 2001, out of nowhere, we got a chance to move to America. We took it and settled in Iowa. There were local chapters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in every state around us – Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, and Nebraska – but not one in Iowa.

My brother and I were the only Ahmadi Muslims in Iowa. We tried our best to share the message of Islam but people in America seemed less interested in religion. But the two of us stuck with our faith. We would even conduct Friday services even though it was just the two of us. Just imagine, I would stand up in front of my brother and give him a sermon. (We didn't know at the time that you needed at least three people to hold service!)

A few years later, in 2004, we decided to rent a separate apartment reserved only for offering prayers. As Ramadhan was around the corner (and no mosques around any corners of our town) it proved to be very successful. Muslims started coming to offer prayers at the apartment because the next closest place was 12 miles away. From then on, before and after prayers, we would have coffee, juice, or soda and discuss Ahmadiyya beliefs, the Muslim world, the latter days, and so on. By the grace of Allah, three whole families joined the Community. That apartment is still in use to this day. I loved sharing

the message of Islam so much that Bilal Rana, MKA's National Secretary for Propagation, asked me to be his assistant secretary. I assisted him for nearly a year.

Religiosity is probably the biggest difference between people in Bosnia and America. In Bosnia, we would go out into the streets and have live conversation on Islam. Here, it is different. We still try to reach out but people do not walk as much (hey, this is Iowa, you need a car to get to most places) and when they are out shopping they do not want to be distracted by religion.

On the other hand, what I really like about Americans is their willingness to engage in open dialogue. People often come together to hold interfaith dialogues, to sit together and discuss. In Bosnia, people are still very closed off to such discussion. They are not willing to listen, in my opinion, because they do not know enough about their own religion.

In the beginning, it was just my brother and me. After a few visits to the Chicago chapter and MKA retreats, however, we started to build friendships. We visit friends and they visit us now. This brotherhood is an important part of our lives.

Khilafat is another important part. I never got a chance to meet the Fourth Khalifa, but I met our present Khalifa in May 2008. As any first experience with the Khalifa goes, it was very interesting. Upon entering the room, my brother was first to shake his hand. I came up next and said, "Your Holiness, in my country, when you love someone, you hug them." He said, okay, go ahead and hug me then. With a big smile I hugged him, then my brother said, "I want to hug you too Your Holiness!" It was really funny. During our meeting, His Holiness said, "You look like rugby player," more than a couple times to me. Then on the way out, I hugged him again.

"What I really like about Americans is their willingness to engage in open dialogue."

I remember telling His Holiness that I was going to the Bosnian Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention, and then back to America for our annual convention. Back in the U.S., a month later, I was on duty when we were told to line up for the Khalifa's inspection of the convention site. I lined up along with hundreds of people. When he came to me, he stopped and said, "You made it back, huh?" Everyone was looking at me and I was so surprised that he remembered me!

By the grace of Allah, later that year, in November, I got married to my wife, Attia Toor, in Rabwah, Pakistan. Our chapter in Iowa is small, but growing, and life good, by the Grace of Allah.

Nothing in life is accident. Everything is with purpose. I believe if you are looking for the right thing, you follow that instinct that Allah gives you in your gut, then you are going to find the right path, and you will reach the peak of your life, spiritually, and share that light with others. Yet at times, faith goes up and goes down. Sometimes it is not as strong as it should be, so I always struggle to keep it strong, so I can reach the spiritual heights we are meant to reach.

Among believers it is very easy to explain Allah exists. Yet it is hard to transfer all those thoughts onto paper. Every believer has his own experiences that cement the truth in their heart, mind and soul. If you were to have me speak with anyone in the world now, they could not convince that Islam Ahmadiyya is not true, not the Pope, not a mullah, or anyone else.



Edvin Bajrektarevic had the opportunity to briefly meet His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, while he inspected the site of the 2008 Annual Convention of the USA Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

“Allah loves those who turn to Him and loves those who keep themselves clean.”

- Holy Qur'an, 2:223



Jalil Musiddiq Deseignoria
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

“As I began to study Islam, the mission of Jesus Christ and the status of God began to change in my mind.”

I was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania along with my brother and sister. As a child I was very active, playing outside with my friends in the neighborhood for hours. I was also very active in sports, playing basketball, soccer, and football. In high school I played the safety position for the varsity football team. I also have to admit I really like to play video games.

I grew up in a fairly religious household, my immediate and extended family being members of the 7th Day Adventist Congregation. We would attend church as a family on a weekly basis. I remember during my middle school years I became a youth deacon for the church as well. Seventh Day Adventists observe Saturday as their Sabbath, practice a healthy lifestyle in accordance with Kosher Laws, and place great emphasis on a second coming of Jesus Christ.

While I was surrounded by a Christian atmosphere, during my middle school years I began to feel unsure about what I was learning. When I would ask for help to understand some of the Church's teachings, I received answers that did not make much sense. When I pressed the issue I was always told, "You got to have faith." Gradually, I lost any attachment I had to Christianity, but I still felt this void in my heart. I felt as if something had to fill this emptiness inside of me.

One of my strengths was that I was open-minded – I always wanted to learn what else was out there. Some of my friends at the time were Muslim. I cannot say if it was because of them or for some other reason, but I began to feel a strong attachment towards Islam. The structure and discipline Islam

instilled in its followers' lives was a very attractive characteristic. As I began to study Islam more and more, the mission of Jesus Christ and the status of God began to change in my mind. I would often have discussions with my parents about the mission of Prophet Jesus and the nature of God. While they were not hostile at all, naturally, they were curious as to why I wanted to engage in these discussions and study Islam.

During the summer of 2001, following my junior year in high school, I began an intense study of Islam and visited many mosques in the area. Wherever I could find literature I would pick it up and read it through until I got to visit another mosque. I had family that was in the Nation of Islam and studied their teachings as well. After some time, a great urge to take *shahaadah* was born inside of me. I cannot explain what made me feel this way but I could not deny the feeling. Alhamdulillah, in the spring of 2002 I took the *shahaadah* in a Sunni mosque named Masjid Allah. After becoming a Muslim, I continued an intense study of Islam. In the middle of 2003 my friend told me of a nearby mosque. I told my friend that we should attend Friday service there. At the time I did not know that Nasir Mosque was an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque, nor did I know the teachings of the Promised Messiah.

During that first Friday sermon, an intense feeling of solace and contentment came over me, and after the sermon was over, I was in tears and my heart was trembling. I had no idea what the teachings of this Community were but I knew this was the mosque I had to attend. I had the blessed opportunity to learn from the late Munir Hamid, Rafiq Ahmad, and Imam Azhar Haneef.

In addition to speaking with these and other brothers about the teachings of the Ahmadiyya Community, I continued my study of Islam using any literature I could get my hands on. Aside from the purity of its teachings, what attracted me most to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was the unparalleled brotherhood I experienced, and, of course, the Khalifa (about whom I will speak on later).

Alhamdulillah, in the summer of 2003 I was blessed with the opportunity to take the pledge. Entering the Community was a huge blessing, and the transition to life as an Ahmadi Muslim was not difficult. I suppose I was living as an Ahmadi Muslim even before my initiation.

The effect the Community has had on my life is remarkable. I have become far more dedicated to my responsibilities at work, as a banker, to my family, and to my Lord. I attribute all this to the blessings of Khilafat. Of all the blessings I have received as part of the Community, meeting the Khalifa has been the best by far. To me, Khilafat is the embodiment of worldwide spiritual leadership.

Our Khalifa is the guide for any individual who wishes to prosper in life and I pray more and more of the world becomes aware of this blessing.

I had the blessed opportunity to meet the Khalifa on two occasions. The first time was a quick meet and greet during the 2005 Canadian Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention. I can still recall walking by His Holiness and shaking his hand; I immediately noticed a glow on his face and an indescribable energy about him. The second time was during the 2008 Convention in England. I was part of an American delegation that traveled to England to partake in the blessings of the Convention. His Holiness asked me what duties I had in the Philadelphia chapter and I informed him that I was in charge of spreading the message of Islam Ahmadiyya for MKA since 2006, and asked for his prayers.

“During that first Friday sermon, an intense feeling of solace and contentment came over me, and after the sermon was over, I was in tears and my heart was trembling.”

I must also make note of the blessings of MKA. This group of brothers has affected me tremendously and shown me what true brotherhood is. I truly feel I have an entire network of brothers who are willing to help me with anything in my life, without hesitation. I just hope it carries on to other people as well, so that they can see the unity and brotherhood of our Community.

The MKA retreat is one such event where all the brothers get together in the spirit of brotherhood and spirituality. I love participating in sports and religious competitions and feel the atmosphere helps those who are weak in their knowledge to learn more as well as build stronger ties of brotherhood.

“Verily, Allah does not look upon your bodies and your outward appearances; rather, He looks at your hearts.”

***- Holy Prophet Muhammad
Sahih Muslim***



Zaman Mohammad
Queens, New York

**“Khilafat is the rope by which
we remain close to Almighty Allah.”**

I joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 2003. It is through the grace of Almighty Allah that I was given the knowledge and mental fortitude to grasp the concept of the Promised Messiah, which is a concept inherent in truthful Islamic teachings. I was born and raised near Dhaka, Bangladesh in a very Islamic-oriented family which included two brothers and one sister. My father was very keen on religious education, and thus, my siblings and I learned to recite the Qur'an and offer prayers at a very young age. In many respects, I came from a typical observant Sunni Muslim family. My contact with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Bangladesh was virtually non-existent, since during my childhood, the Community was relatively small in numbers. Today, by the grace of God, the Community is much larger and more visible in Bangladesh, and our mosques are well-known.

Growing up around various other religious communities, I did not witness the brotherhood, love, care, and respect at the level that I have found to exist today in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. It does not matter who you are, where you come from, or what your “social status” or profession is. Everyone in our Community, and specifically MKA, is a brother to one another. This is the beauty of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. And that was precisely what attracted me to the Community and brought me closer to its members. I will never forget the warm welcome that I received when, for the very first time, I visited our Community's Queens, NY mosque. An Ahmadi Muslim friend accompanied me to this mosque, and introduced me to the local chapter president, along with some members of MKA. This Community best espoused

the true Islamic teachings of hospitality and excellent treatment of guests and neighbors alike, regardless of their race, ethnicity, and religious belief. This treatment reminded me of incidences from the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

The various misconceptions that I had of Ahmadi Muslims disintegrated very soon after I started praying alongside Ahmadi Muslims in their mosque. I did not find anything “wrong” with their method of offering prayers, or their behavior more largely. To me, Ahmadi Muslims seemed like normal, observant Muslims. Most importantly, I have witnessed the upkeep and daily practice of true Islamic teachings in their lives. Ahmadi Muslims believe in the divine significance of the words included in the Qur'an, and they study God's Holy Book with effort and inspiration, rather than simply reciting it, which was what I did before.

Moreover, Ahmadi Muslims also attempt as best as they can to make the pilgrimage to Mecca for Hajj, just as other Muslims do. And truthfully, Ahmadi Muslims believe in the Prophet Muhammad even more deeply than other Muslims do. In fact, the non-Ahmadiyya communities of Muslims are the ones that remain sorely deficient in their practice of basic Islamic tenets, including financial sacrifice. I have also noticed a disturbing disconnect in Sunni Muslim families between parents and their children, particularly in large urban areas in the United States (like New York City). These various observations triggered in me a sincere desire to seek out “the real Islam.” I was yearning for something more from my faith, something that only the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the spiritual blessing of the Ahmadiyya Khilafat could give to me.

Reading our Community's books (such as *Jesus in India*, *The Gulf Crisis and the New World Order*, and *Christianity: A Journey from Facts to Fiction*) enabled me to learn more and more about religion and contemporary affairs. These books also further illuminated for me the truthfulness of the Promised Messiah's message, and they currently serve as a great reference tool for efforts to spread our message with both non-Ahmadi Muslims as well as non-Muslims generally.

By the grace of Allah, I was initiated into the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 2003 during the Annual Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention. Since that time, I have thoroughly enjoyed attending our annual conventions, as well as MKA's youth retreats, which enable us all to get to know members from our Community from all around the country. These events work to further strengthen the bonds of brotherhood that we as Ahmadi Muslims enjoy.

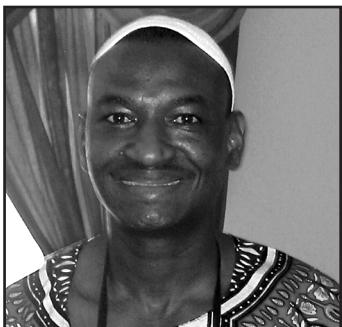
I can proudly say that, by the grace of God, my life has changed for the better, spiritually, financially, and emotionally since my conversion. I have made many friends in the Community, and I spend a lot of time engaged in local Community work. I keep track of our chapter's contact information, which keeps in constant touch with my brothers, and I am also involved our publications work.

“My parents remain particularly impressed by the fact that our Community is, by the grace of God, completely devoid of the sort of violence that plagues other Muslim sects.”

I must mention that without the support of my wife, I would not be in the position that I am today. An Ahmadi Muslim herself, she has steadfastly supported me in my life as an Ahmadi Muslim. My parents (who still reside in Bangladesh) are generally supportive as well, though they have not yet joined our Community, mostly on the account of the difficult (i.e. anti-Ahmadi) environment that exists in my country of birth. But I know that they recognize that Ahmadi Muslims today are the only Muslims carrying the true banner of Islam. My parents remain particularly impressed by the fact that our Community is, by the grace of God, completely devoid of the sort of violence that plagues other Muslim sects.

"The members of my Community, wherever they might be, should listen with attention. The purpose of their joining this movement and establishing the mutual relationship of spiritual preceptor and disciple with me is that they should achieve a high degree of good conduct, good behavior and righteousness."

***- Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
The Promised Messiah***



Alpha Bah
Zion, Illinois

**“...there was a very inviting and lovely message
- Love for All, Hatred for None.”**

Joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 2004 helped to strengthen my faith in Islam. As a born Muslim in West Africa, I inherited Islam – which I took for granted. Due to my own complacency, I did not make Islam a way of life. Yet it always troubled me, so I decided to move far away from my friends and neighborhood. I wanted to reform myself, but every time I tried, I met with failure. I desired to change my life for the better by moving away from trouble and those things that interfered with my faith.

In 2004 I came to America, in search of a permanent home for my family. At the time I was in the Chicago area. By the grace and mercy of Allah, my journey took me to Zion, about 45 minutes north of Chicago. At first, because I didn't know there were Muslims in Zion, I continued to travel more than 40 miles to Friday service on the south side of Chicago. One day I was driving east on Route 173 in Zion and my wife saw a peach colored building with a sign, reading: “Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.” At the rear of the building there was a very inviting and lovely message: “Love for all, hatred for none.” My wife said, “Alpha, there is a Muslim community right here in Zion!” The very next Friday I prepared to attend the Friday service in Zion.

However, next Friday came and went and I didn't make it there. It was not until the fourth Friday that I made it to the mosque. I believe Allah finally led me there, as I had been searching for a righteous community to be a part of. I now believe the main reason I came to America was to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The first day I came to the mosque, I met brother Junayd Latif. It was like I knew him all my life; we instantly connected, and have

stayed connected ever since. I continued to come to the mosque for prayers, and I attended most of the events that the Zion chapter organized. I studied the Community's literature, including their commentary on the Holy Qur'an. I fasted with the Community that same year. That Ramadhan was the best Ramadhan I have ever had in my whole life.

The following year was the next best I ever had. I took the pledge in 2005, after the holy month of Ramadhan. It was easy for me to join the movement because I knew I needed to reform myself and I knew my people in West Africa (Guinea in particular) were in need of reformation. In Guinea, everyone takes Islam for granted, which has led to the loss of its essence and spirit there. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has helped enlighten me on the True Islam. Now I am convinced that the revival and final triumph of Islam will come through the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The missionary work of the Community and its results points to the truth of the Promised Messiah.

It was easy for me to see the true spirit of Islam within the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I saw the true spirit of Islam within the Zion chapter. The various members I have encountered have shown true Islamic brotherhood. I also saw the love that they have for Khilafat.

In 2008 I traveled to Ghana to celebrate 100 years of Khilafat. There, I was a witness to this spirit. The spirit of love for the faith and Khilafat, and the spirit of brotherhood in obedience, both left indelible marks on my soul. I will never forget what I saw in that wonderful trip to Ghana, in May 2008. I continued to be inspired by the Ahmadiyya message. I also attended the 2008 American Ahmadiyya Muslim Convention, which continues to give me the strength to move forward in my devotion to Islam and Khilafat. In spirituality, since joining the Ahmadiyya Community, I have matured with wisdom and patience.

In Ghana I also had the opportunity to meet the Khalifa. I introduced myself to him and told him I was new convert. He asked me how long I had been an Ahmadi Muslim and I replied, "four years," and he said you are not new anymore! Everyone laughed. Khilafat is special to me for two reasons. First, in Guinea, everyone is a Muslim. Yet where I grew up, there was no leadership. You would go to the mosque, pray, give some cash, and that was it. No structure. No organization. No one to give weekly guidance or direction with a global perspective. Khilafat fills that void. Second, we used to have Khilafat, but I only used to read about it in the history books. Now, however, it is here again and we can benefit from it, if we only make an effort.

By Allah's grace and mercy I have indeed become more self-analytical. I now understand that the real jihad begins with one's self. I was sick and suffering,

but praise be to Allah that I found the doctor in the Promised Messiah, and his Community. The love he had for the Prophet Muhammad, and the love he had for Islam caused the light within me to connect with my Maker. I continue to struggle for righteousness, not only for myself, but also for my family, my community and the world.

I have decided to dedicate some of my time to share the teachings of Islam with others. I am now a chaplain at the Lake County and Kenosha County Jails here in Illinois. We have an active Jail Ministry with several other Zion chapter members. Our mission is to improve the moral and religious knowledge of inmates, and help with their family issues, all through the teachings of Islam.

I have learned that ignorance and bad influences lead a lot of people to make mistakes that land them in jail. In terms of ignorance, many people do not know that when you do wrong you are going to pay somehow, sooner or later. I believe if you do wrong you are going to have face some kind of wrong yourself. Secondly, bad influences also lead people to the wrong path. What they see on television, so-called friends, local communities, or just having no role models or family to show them the right way – all can get a person into trouble.

But I have also seen that people are genuinely capable of reformation. Not everyone is ready “right now,” as many are not yet aware of the harm they are doing to themselves, their family, community and the world. They are still lost in the woods, as it were. But some people are ready for reformation. I believe readiness comes in time. Going to jail does not automatically deter people from making mistakes – I have seen some leave, return, leave and return again. As a matter of fact, one guy just left and I hope I don’t see him again!

But by the grace of Allah, there are always shining examples of reformation. I use one inmate in particular as a role model. His sister was married to a Muslim, but he never got why he used to pray all the time. Well, when he got sent to jail, he studied Islam, and he completely changed his life. He was totally freed from his bad ways, sincerely and completely reformed. About 50 brothers have accepted Islam while incarcerated.

Since joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community I have improved in my own religious knowledge and spiritual development as well. I hope to continue in this transformation my entire life, InshaAllah. I have dedicated my life to spreading the true teachings of Islam. May Allah bring the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad into the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. May Allah bless the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in its effort to bring the message of True Islam to the world.

“O men, what I say to you, you must hear and remember. All Muslims are as brethren to one another. All of you are equal. All men, whatever nation or tribe they may belong to, and whatever station in life they may hold, are equal. Even as the fingers of the two hands are equal, so are human beings equal to one another. No one has any right, any superiority to claim over another. You are as brothers.”

***- Holy Prophet Muhammad
Farewell Address***



Micah Taair
Oak Park, Illinois

**“In the end it is just you
and your relationship with God.”**

I was born and raised in Oak Park, a westside suburb of Chicago. I first became conscious of Islam in junior high school. I read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Later when the movie came out I was again impressed with this religion called Islam. I was raised as a Christian but never felt rigidly confined to it. During my last year of high school I had a rough time. Certain situations had me depressed when out of nowhere in the mail came a new age book called *The Celestine Prophecy*. I picked it up and started reading it. I was so engaged by it that I skipped school the next day to finish it. That book started a wider interest for me in spiritual matters.

During the first two years of my college career I went to a school that was not far from the city of Zion. It just so happened that there were several Ahmadi Muslims who worked and studied there. One, who was an older gentleman, was a part-time student. His wife also worked in the library. This gentleman would hold informal “Learn about Islam” workshops. So I went. While at this one class, he basically covered the five pillars of Islam and added general commentary.

Still knowing nothing about Ahmadiyya beliefs I walked into the library one day and there was another Muslim who was working there. I had met him before briefly outside the library, but on this day we talked a little bit more at length. He was an African-American who was married to a white woman and they had several kids. As I am a product of the same type of interracial marriage we talked about race in America and how times have changed. Then he mentioned how the teachings of Islam deal with racial problems. He said he

wanted to give me a book called *The Afrocentric Myth*. (Eventually he got it to me and that was the first book I read that also dealt with Ahmadiyya beliefs.) He also gave me some mind-blowing information about Prophet Jesus and the Second Coming. Information that made it impossible for me not to want to investigate further.

When I transferred to a school in Chicago in my third year, I was told if I wanted to learn more that I should go by the Sadiq Mosque on the South side. Eventually I got around to it and started to attend the Friday services and other special events they had.

The missionary in Chicago at that time, Imam Azhar Haneef, was one of two reasons why I eventually joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

The other reason was because I read 90% of the Community's English books prior to joining. Before someone chooses to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community they should read a lot. A LOT. If they are lucky enough to have a "sheikh" to learn from, that can be very beneficial too. Unfortunately, in my opinion, many join Islam just because of the brotherhood. But if they later feel that brotherhood is lacking or has failed them, they run away flailing their arms, and reject Islam altogether. (Which only means they weren't attached to Islam to begin with.) Brotherhood is something you can get just about anywhere.

What you cannot get is the wisdom contained in the words of the founder of this Community, and that is more important to your faith, because in the end, it is just you and your relationship with God. Brotherhood and sisterhood is not perfect all the time, but every time you read the Word of God, or the inspired words of a prophet of God, that is perfect, even if in your imperfections you cannot fully understand it. Those ideas that you do grasp, you should then understand that and live up to that, even if others are not doing so, because it is the message that is the truth. This is why you read, read, read and 10 years later after joining you read, read, read again.

Even before I accepted Islam I was aware of the tradition, particularly among African-Americans, of changing their names. Now there is much debate concerning this issue, and the reasons surrounding it. I was told that it was not necessary for me to change my name. But one brother told me that if you do choose a name, pick a name that has a meaning. A name that you want to represent you or one you want to live up to. So if your name is "Abdullah" you would want to strive to be a manifestation of its meaning, "servant of Allah." No offense to anyone with a traditional Islamic name but my thought was that there are already many who go by a handful of common Muslim names. Seeking to be different, I decided to go a different route. Now as my mother

had already named me after a prophet of the Bible, and as that prophet is a prophet of Allah, I decided to keep my first name.

However I had inherited my last name from the plantation owner who had enslaved my ancestors. So in defining myself according to my religion, I was so very inclined to lose that and replace it with something else. Around that time I was reading the Holy Qur'an with commentary. I came to the story that dealt with Prophet Jesus and his commanding of the birds. Reading the commentary on that I saw that the Arabic word "Taair" means bird, but it also means a person who flies high in their religion and soars spiritually. That was what I wanted to strive for. That word, I felt, represented my whole program. It represented how I approached this from the beginning, and even now.

So I fitted it to the end of Micah and liked how it sounded together, and from then on I went by Micah Taair. Micah means, "Who is like God?" The Prophet Micah, being firmly grounded in the unity of Allah, would have known that no one is like God. But at the same time, all the prophets are perfect human reflections of God's attributes. They were highly spiritual people. So I thought my name Micah Taair was like a question and an answer. Who is like God? No one, except one who flies high spiritually will be like God. And that is what I want to be, like the prophets and saints and disciples. And this is who all Muslims are reminded to be like in Surah Al-Fatiyah, the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an.

Since joining the Community, I have been blessed to meet the Fifth Khalifa on several occasions in London and America. Meeting the Khalifa is rejuvenating and revitalizing. Whenever I write to him and receive a letter back, my spirit is uplifted. He has helped me with his prayers and his genuine concern for me.

"I have been blessed to experience a morsel of spiritual experiences that make faith less speculative and more certain."

I have also helped an Ahmadi Muslim author in writing a book and am now working on writing my own book. I have had the pleasure of traveling and meeting other Muslims of our Community across the world. But most importantly, I have been blessed to experience a morsel of spiritual experiences that make faith less speculative and more certain. Alhamdulillah, all praise is due to God.

Despite my many wonderful experiences since accepting Islam, if one thinks that by accepting this that everything in your life will get better, that would be a silly notion. It is a part of God's design that we must suffer trials. So it is not strange to me that there have been many trials in my life even after accepting Islam. The difference is that Islam gives you more of an understanding as to why life is the way it is, and gives you the means to deal with those trials through prayer, among other things.

Dear reader, if you are investigating Islam as a religion, and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's understanding of it (versus others), the safest and smartest way to go about it is as follows: Pray regularly on this issue; donate regularly to a charity of some sort in dedication to your spiritual quest; dedicate some days to fasting over this issue; and finally, do a proper and thorough investigation, i.e. read the books. Always remember that God wants you to be rightly guided to Him. In taking this sincere approach, God will surely guide you to Him.



Micah Taair participating in the Spoken Word competition during the 2004 Youth Retreat of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya USA, held in Detroit, Michigan. Seated on the left is fellow convert Sohail Husain (read his story on p. 74).



Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq

The Muslim Sun Rising: A Portrait of the First Muslim Missionary in America

By: Bilal Rana

The 'Roaring Twenties'

Unlike Europe, America emerged virtually unharmed from World War I and saw an era of promise and fast moving change. “The Roaring Twenties” was the most explosive decade of the century in a variety of ways. A time of economic prosperity, but also of social movements rooted in obtaining fundamental rights for some, and denying them to others. Against the backdrop of an America in search for her identity arrived a visionary companion of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the spiritual second coming of Christ.

Champion of the Seas: A Fantastic Voyage

The Second Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community commissioned Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq to travel from India to America in order to establish a mission. Sadiq travelled to America on the SS Haverford. While on the vessel, he would introduce himself to travelers as “Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, missionary for the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam.” He would convey to them the following Qur’anic exhortation: “Say, if you love Allah, then follow me and He will love you.” He fascinated passengers on the ship with his demeanor, who were mystified by his extraordinary faith and regal dress. Before reaching shore, Sadiq had already won seven converts to Islam: four Chinese, one Yugoslavian, one Syrian, and one American.

Arrested Development

He arrived in Philadelphia on February 15, 1920. To his dismay, skeptical immigration authorities, instructed to profile “those wearing turbans,” interrogated him at length. Immigration officers accused him of wanting to preach polygamy. He stated: “I have not come here to teach the plurality of wives.” He also rhetorically asked what would happen “if Jesus Christ comes to America and applies for admission to the United States under [your] immigration laws,” stating that the immigration authorities would decide “that Jesus would not be allowed to enter this country because (1) he comes from a land which is out of the permitted zone; (2) he has no money with him; (3) he is indecently dressed; (4) he has no credentials to show that he is an authorized preacher.” His amusing and clever wit notwithstanding, Sadiq would spend the next six weeks incarcerated. During his detention, Sadiq wrote to the Khalifa, who wrote back declaring, “America cannot and will not stop our entry into the country to establish our mission.”

Sadiq later reflected, “Those were the days of great trial, but I count them as the days of blessings... I began preaching quietly among the others detained like myself.” Like on the Haverford, in the seven weeks he spent at the detention center, he came to develop a bond with his fellow detainees. Like him, many were immigrants denied entry for various reasons. In that short span of time, 21 detainees joined the fold of Islam from various countries, including Jamaica, British Guiana (Guyana), Honduras, Portugal, Azores, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Poland, Italy and France. As the Khalifa had foretold, Sadiq was released on the grounds that he will not preach polygamy.

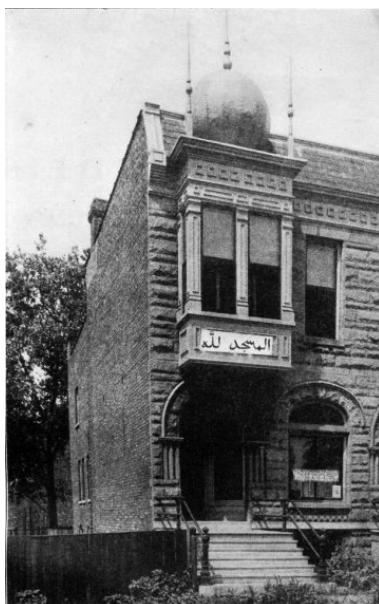
A Mufti in Victorian America

After his release from the detention center, he moved to New York City and converted a handful of Harlem residents. The American press covered Sadiq’s arrival in America with headlines such as “Picturesque Sadiq,” “Hopes to Convert U.S.,” “Speaks Seven Tongues,” “Hopes to Win Converts to Mohamet”, “Sadiq A Liberal”, “Optimistic in Detention,” and “East Indian Here with New Religion.” His Indian identity and distinguished outfit gave him an exotic charm that caught the attention of onlookers. Mainstream American media described him as a, “strange dark man, with a heavy gray beard wearing a bright green and golden turban, adorned in a dark coat with flowing sleeves,” who was said to have “a gospel likeness” about him, with “clear brown eyes who would look and speak like a biblical prophet.” Once while passing on a street in Chicago

a small girl cheerfully pointed out to her mother, "Look mother! Jesus Christ has come!" When approached by her parents, Sadiq explained that he was not Christ, but that he was an ordinary disciple of the Promised Messiah here to preach in America.

The Muslim Sun Rising

After a brief stay in New York, he moved the headquarters of his mission to Highland Park, Detroit. In his first year of preaching, he delivered over 50 lectures on Islam. With momentum mounting, in July 1921 he founded the first American Muslim magazine, *The Moslem Sunrise* (renamed *The Muslim Sunrise* in 1950). The cover of each issue pictured a sunrise over North America, symbolizing the rising sun of Islam in this continent. This periodical carries the distinction of being the earliest and longest running Muslim publication in America, and is still published today. Himself a tireless writer, he reached out to many distinguished personalities, which included Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, and he even exchanged letters with President Harding, which were published in *The Muslim Sunrise*. For the serious historian, the magazine has proven to be an invaluable, detailed record of the early history of Islam in America.



The historic mosque building purchased in 1922, located at
4448 S. Wabash Avenue, Chicago. Later renamed Al-Sadiq Mosque.

Gusts of Change from The Windy City

In 1922 he moved the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to Chicago. He kept close ties with the converts in Highland Park, Detroit, where a mosque was purchased and donated for the services of the Community by one of his followers. But it was in Chicago where the first permanent mosque of the community was acquired, becoming one of the seminal mosques in America and is still used daily retaining its historic address, 4448 S. Wabash Avenue. It served as the national headquarters until 1950. Since then, it has been rebuilt and renamed “Al-Sadiq Mosque” in his honor. He preached at several meetings of the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) in Detroit, founded by the revolutionary Marcus Garvey, and converted 40 Garveyites to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. He was invited to give talks in many schools and various societies, sometimes on a regular basis.

The Sheep Become Shepherds

He argued that African Americans inherited Christianity from their slave masters. Their true heritage, should they seek it, was stolen from them and lay in Africa where Muslims numbered millions. The number of converts began to swell, but each with a unique story. One American lady wrote to him that in a dream she saw herself being guided by a pious man from India. Sadiq then shared with her some photographs of the Promised Messiah, which she identified as the man who appeared in her dream. He quickly realized his efforts could multiply if people of such faith joined him in a “jihad,” as it were, of the pen and of the tongue. Under his guidance, they began publishing advertisements and started a campaign of letters and words. Of these converts, the most qualified became “sheikhs,” and in various cities began study circles, gaining converts by the dozens, especially in the Midwest. Also of note are the special contribution women made in the movement playing a very crucial role which included writing and lecturing.

From Detainee to Doctor

In addition to his scholarly knowledge of religion, he was a skilled linguist and was fluent in seven languages, including Hebrew and Arabic. He was invited to membership in various societies of intellectual standing, and was given honorary doctorates by multiple American universities in recognition for his services here, among them a doctorate in theology, and doctorate in

literature. The same country that incarcerated him was now bestowing on him their highest honors. That he was America's chief-most representative of Islam at large was the consensus of many major newspapers. He was consulted as the official voice to instruct the public on all matters pertaining to Islam. Before his return home, the press widely appreciated and recognized Sadiq. He also said that during his time in the West, there were plots devised to kill him by spiteful adversaries. Nevertheless, he emerged unscathed and well respected for his contributions to education and services to human welfare.

Whispers of the Morning Breeze

The hour had arrived. Tears swelled in his eyes and streamed down his cheeks when his ship was about to depart. Not because he didn't want to leave. But rather, he wept tears of humility, and said, "I have not been able to do full justice to my assigned duty, and I confess my failing in service." He started out a lone voice in a foreign land, but in two and a half years left more than 700 converts. Himself a convert, he was deeply sensitive to the sentiments of American converts to Islam, and desired to stay longer, despite not having



Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq pictured with the Holy Qur'an.

seen his family or Khalifa for two and a half years. In September of 1923, he returned to India. By 1924, more than 1,000 converts joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. By 1933 there were sprawling Ahmadiyya Community chapters in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Detroit and Kansas City. By the following decade, there were firm establishments in New York, St. Louis, Dayton, Washington DC, Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Baltimore.

In addition to publishing the first Muslim journal, the Ahmadi Muslims were the first to provide and mass distribute an English translation of the Holy Qur'an in America. The Community also furnished nearly all of the Islamic literature available to the general membership of American Muslims until the 1960s, including their materials used for preaching. Prior to leaving for home, Sadiq reflected, "I cannot claim to have done any great work but I do hope by the grace of Allah, that in clearing the way for future missionaries of Islam, I have done some pioneer work and have sown the seed of truth throughout the land that will grow up in time and that will show in big, tall strong trees to feed and shelter thousands and send out healthy vibrations to millions."

Today, the memory of Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq serves as a reminder that American Muslims must strive to advance his legacy of greatness with their own noble efforts.



Front cover of the first edition of *The Moslem Sunrise* from July, 1921.

Ten Conditions of Initiation
Joining the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, the Promised Messiah & Mahdi

I

The initiate shall solemnly promise that he/she shall abstain from *shirk* [associating any partner with God] right up to the day of his/her death.

II

That he/she shall keep away from falsehood, fornication/adultery, trespasses of the eye, debauchery, dissipation, cruelty, dishonesty, mischief and rebellion; and that he/she will not permit himself/herself to be carried away by passions, however strong they might be.

III

That he/she shall regularly offer the five daily Prayers in accordance with the commandments of God and the Holy Prophet Muhammad and shall try his/her best to be regular in offering the *tahajjud* and invoking *durud* on the Holy Prophet Muhammad. That he/she shall make it his/her daily routine to ask forgiveness for his/her sins, to remember the bounties of God and to praise and glorify Him.

IV

That under the impulse of any passions, he/she shall cause no harm whatsoever to the creatures of God in general and Muslims in particular, neither by his/her tongue, hands, nor any other means.

V

That he/she shall remain faithful to God in all circumstances of life, in sorrow and in happiness, in adversity and in prosperity, in felicity and in trial; and that he/she shall in all conditions remain resigned to the decree of God and keep himself/herself ready to face all kinds of indignities and sufferings in His way and shall never turn away from Him at the onslaught of any misfortune; on the contrary, he/she shall march forward.

VI

That he/she shall refrain from following un-Islamic customs and lustful inclinations and shall completely submit himself/herself to the authority of the Holy Qur'an; and that he/she shall make the Word of God and the sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad his/her guiding principles in every walk of his/her life.

VII

That he/she shall entirely give up pride and vanity and shall pass all his/her life in humbleness, cheerfulness, forbearance and meekness.

VIII

That he/she shall hold faith, the honor of faith and the cause of Islam dearer than his/her life, wealth, honour, children, and all loved ones.

IX

That he/she shall keep himself/herself occupied in the service of God's creatures for His sake only and shall endeavour towards the beneficence of mankind to the best of his/her God-given abilities and powers.

X

That he/she shall enter into a bond of brotherhood with this humble servant of God, pledging obedience to me in everything good for the sake of God, and remain faithful to it until the day of his/her death. That he/she shall exert such a high devotion in the observance of this bond as is not to be found in any other worldly relationship and connection that demand devoted dutifulness.

Glossary of Terms Used

Alhamdulillah—“All praise belongs to Allah”- an expression of gratitude

Allah—The personal name of God in Islam.

Ahadith—Plural of *Hadith*; See **Hadith**.

Ahmadi Muslim—A member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community—The Community of Muslims, established in 1889, who accept the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian as being the Promised Messiah and *Mahdi*.

Ameen—“May Allah make it so.”

Amila—Board of secretaries overseeing activities in various departments of *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya*, found at local, regional and national levels.

Annual Convention—See **Jalsa Salana**.

Assalaamu ‘alaykum—“Peace be upon you.” An Islamic salutation.

Bai’at—Oath of allegiance to a religious leader; initiation at the hands of a Prophet or his *Khalifa*.

Bukhari—A book of *ahadith* (the sayings) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Eid—A Muslim feast day; Islamic celebrations at the end of Ramadhan and at the conclusion of Pilgrimage.

Hadith—A saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The plural is *ahadith*.

Hajj—Pilgrimage to the House of Allah in Mecca, Arabia; also known as the fifth pillar of Islam.

His Holiness—Referred to affectionately as *Hadhur* in Arabic. A term of respect for a holy personage.

Holy Prophet—A term used exclusively for the Prophet Muhammad.

Holy Qur'an—The Book sent by Allah for the guidance of mankind. It was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years.

Ijtema—“Gathering”; youth retreat of members of *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya*.

Imam—“Leader”; The head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community may also be referred to as the *Imam*.

Imam Mahdi—“Guided leader”; the title given to the Promised Reformer by the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

InshaAllah—God-willing.

Jalsa Salana—“Annual Convention” of the greater Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of a country.

Jama’at—“Community”; referring to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Kafir—“Disbeliever”; referring to those who disbelieve in Islam.

Kalima Shahaadah—The declaration of the Islamic faith, in which one states, “I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah. He is One, without any associate. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.”

Khalifa—“Successor”; The word *caliph* is derived from this Arabic word, used in reference to men who succeed prophets as leaders of their communities.

First Khalifa—“First successor” after the Promised Messiah, Maulana Hakim Nuruddin (1841–1914).

Second Khalifa—Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad (1889–1965).

Third Khalifa—Hafiz Mirza Nasir Ahmad (1909–1982)

Fourth Khalifa—Mirza Tahir Ahmad (1928–2003)

Fifth Khalifa—Mirza Masroor Ahmad became the fifth successor of the Promised Messiah in 2003 and is the current Imam of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Khilafat—The institution of successorship in Islam.

Lajna Ima’illah—“Maid-servants of Allah”; an organization of Ahmadi Muslim women above the age of fifteen years.

Mahdi—“The guided one.” This is the title given by the Holy Prophet Muhammad to the awaited Reformer of the Latter Days.

Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya—An organization of Ahmadi Muslims between the ages of fifteen and forty years, founded in 1938 by the Second Khalifa. In the United States, this organization is also known as the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association*.

MashaAllah—An expression of gratitude to Allah; loosely, By the grace of Allah.

Pledge—Refers to *Bai’at* which is predicated upon the Ten Conditions of Initiation laid down by the Promised Messiah.

Prayers—Generally refers to *Salaat*, the five daily prayers obligatory to all adult Muslims.

Promised Messiah—This term refers to the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian. He claimed that he had been sent by Allah in accordance with the prophecies of the Holy Prophet Muhammad concerning the coming of the *Imam Mahdi* and Messiah from among the Muslims.

Sadr—“President”; refers to national head of *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya*.

Salaam—“Peace”; an Islamic salutation.

Salaat—Five daily Prayers that are obligatory to all adult Muslims.

Shari’ah—Islamic religious law.

Shirk—Associating partners with Allah.

Sufi—An Islamic mystic.

Sunnah—“Traditions” or actions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad of Islam.

Surah—“Chapter” of the Holy Qur’an.

Ummah—The larger community of Muslims.

Youth Retreat—See **Ijtema**.